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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the 1998 issues (issues 3 and 4 are combined) of a quarterly newsletter produced by the Harvard Family Research Project to share new ideas and experiences in evaluating systems reform and comprehensive child and family services. Regular columns include: "From the Director's Desk," "Theory and Practice," "Questions and Answers," "Promising Practices," "Beyond Basic Training," and "Evaluations To Watch." The feature "New and Noteworthy" provides annotated bibliographies of relevant new resources, and "Electronic Mailbox" describes related Web sites. Issue number 1, which focuses on performance measurement, includes the articles: (1) "Aiming for Accountability: Lessons Learned from Eight States"; (2) "Building Support for Statewide Outcomes: Lessons from Florida"; (3) "Do You Really Want To Be Accountable for Results? Musings on Georgia's Learnings"; (4) "National Learning Project Evaluation"; and (5) "Ensuring Quality in Head Start: The FACES Study." Issue number 2 includes: (1) "Learning from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Evaluation Grants Program"; (2) "Cluster Evaluation"; (3) "Beyond Basic Training"; (4) "Following up with the Evaluation Work of Asian Neighborhood Design"; and (5) "Welfare, Information, and the New Federalism." Issue number 3-4, focusing on learning organizations, includes: (1) "Useful Learning for Public Action"; (2) "Making the Case for Children"; (3) "Civic Participation and the Citizens Research Method"; (4) "Building State and Local Evaluation Capacity: The U.S. Department of Justice's Evaluation Strategy"; (5) "Studying Learning Initiatives: The Experience of the Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities National Learning Initiative"; and (6) "State Policy Documentation Project: Data Collection and Dissemination." (EV)

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HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE EVALUATION EXCHANGE:

Emerging Strategies in Evaluating Child and Family Services

Volume IV, Number 1 1998 — Free Quarterly Newsletter

From The Director's Desk

Heather B. Weiss
Director HFRP

It has been over five years since Osborne and Graebler began the "accountability revolution" with their book, *Reinventing Government*. Since that time, the notion of results-based accountability (RBA) has reached far beyond the public sector to include foundations, nonprofits, and other community-based organizations. Early supporters and naysayers must be impressed by the extent to which RBA has taken hold.

We have learned a great deal about accountability over the years. The most important thing is perhaps that the development of RBA systems is neither one-shot nor simple. Rather, developing these systems is an iterative process which involves experimentation and continuous reassessment and revision. Further, we now know that there is no one RBA model that can be exported and adopted in all situations. RBA systems are highly contextualized, developing in response to the unique political, social, and institutional environments in which they work. We also know that while RBA systems can help make decisions more information-based, decision making in the public arena always will be in part a political process. Finally, there is the realization that the development of RBA systems is, at its core, a very human process — dependent on champions, relationships, personal credibility, and the ability to engage people who may have a stake in the outcomes of public programs in a frank discussion about what needs to be changed to improve them.

In this issue of the *Evaluation Exchange*, we present articles on RBA that are both retrospective and prospective. Our Theory and Practice article, written by Diane Schilder of HFRP's Results-Based Accountability Project, draws on case studies of eight states to provide a frank assessment of the potential and limitations of RBA systems. Our Promising Practices section highlights two important aspects of RBA systems. Karen Stanford, of the Commission on Government Accountability to the People in Florida, speaks about techniques to engage important stakeholders in the discussion about public outcomes. Janet Bittner, of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Geor-

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Performance Measurement

- **Aiming for Accountability: Lessons Learned from Eight States** 2
- **Interview with Harry Hatry and Joe Wholey** 5
- **Building Support for Statewide Outcomes: Lessons from Florida** 7
- **Do You Really Want to Be Accountable for Results? Musings on Georgia's Learnings** 8
- **Upcoming Evaluation Conferences** 10
- **National Learning Project Evaluation** 11
- **Ensuring Quality in Head Start: The FACES Study** 12
- **New and Noteworthy** 14
- **Electronic Mailbox** 16

gia, draws on the experiences of Georgia to share some insights about engaging assistance in the development of RBA systems. In our Questions and Answers section, Joseph Wholey and Harry Hatry, both of whom have been influential in the movement toward accountability at the federal level, discuss lessons learned and next steps for performance measurement. We highlight two evaluations in our Evaluations to Watch section. The first, by Jay Bell of James Bell Associates, describes the National Learning Project Evaluation of the United Way. The second evaluation, by Ruth Hubbell McKey of Ellswood Associates, Inc. and Louisa Tarullo of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, discusses the FACES study of Head Start. Our Beyond Basic Training section identifies a number of forthcoming conferences. Finally, our New and Noteworthy and Electronic Mailbox sections note important resources to help assist our readers in their accountability work.

In many ways, we are at an important crossroads in the accountability movement. We have lessons to guide us about what does and does not work. The concept of RBA has permeated many organizational layers. We are beginning to collect results data systematically, and must now think about how results information can be used responsibly — to help people "manage for results." We have little experience with this but know that it will involve creating the right incentives, melding quantitative results with good evaluation data to help explain them, and working in a spirit of cooperation. Most importantly, it will require the understanding that to get meaningful results takes time, a commitment to stay the course, and the willingness to learn from what we are doing. ◆

Read
The Evaluation Exchange
online at:
http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~hfrp/eval

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Aiming for Accountability: Lessons Learned from Eight States

Introduction

To reclaim citizen trust and respect and to improve decision making of public managers and policymakers, governments are increasingly turning to new forms of accountability that provide information about the results of public investments. With the implementation of the federal Government Performance and Results Act in 1993, this new form of accountability, called *results-based accountability* (RBA), is taking hold at the federal level. In addition, the shift to RBA at all levels of government and the increased attention to results by foundations demonstrate that RBA may be here to stay.

> ...government policymakers, public managers, workers, and citizens can use RBA to monitor child and family services effectively, learn what is working, change strategies accordingly, and, ultimately, improve outcomes.

The expectations of RBA are that it will improve the results of government programs by:

- Facilitating collaboration among stakeholders on common goals
- Empowering frontline workers
- Reducing regulation, resulting in greater local decision making
- Engaging the public in defining solutions to society's problems
- Demonstrating the results of public investments, thereby increasing public faith in government
- Allowing policymakers to budget for results.

New evidence from a recent study by the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) shows that RBA can be a powerful tool to initiate and enhance systems of continuous improvement and learning. However, many of the expectations of RBA have yet to be met because it is still in the very early stages of implementation in most states. This research shows that government policymakers, public managers, workers, and citizens can use RBA to monitor child and family services effectively, learn what is working, change strategies accordingly, and, ultimately, improve outcomes. To be a useful tool for continuous improvement, RBA efforts must include the *process* of defining a vision and articulating desired results and measures, and the *use* of results data for program improvement and accountability.

Our research shows that if RBA efforts are to reach their potential in improving program quality and increasing accountability, they must be carefully designed and implemented. Lessons learned from the eight states in our study can provide valuable insights to those responsible for RBA efforts.

What is the Current Status of RBA Efforts with Regard to Child and Family Services?

Most states are just beginning to design and implement RBA efforts. Even states that are touted as having the most advanced RBA efforts report that they are "about a 3 on a scale of 1 to 100."

What Factors Have Contributed to the Current Status of RBA Efforts for Child and Family Services?

- ***Expectations are overly ambitious. People compare their progress against a set of unrealistic expectations.*** Unless RBA efforts are designed to promote improvement and flexibility, they will not increase collaboration, empower workers, decentralize decision making, engage the public, or provide assurances to citizens and funders that investments are producing results. Moreover, effectively linking budgets to results is a political process requiring political compromise and negotiation, which can be very difficult. Furthermore, to be implemented effectively, RBA systems require the collection and reporting of significant amounts of data which are often difficult to obtain.

- ***RBA for child and family services is relatively new.*** In the areas of law enforcement, health, and education, many agencies have been collecting and reporting results data for at least a decade. By contrast, in the child and family services arena, results data have been collected and used mostly for research and demonstration projects. As such, RBA efforts for child and family services have had less time to develop compared to RBA in other areas.

- ***Leadership and resources must be committed to the effort.*** Sustained commitment from bipartisan leadership is essential for the successful design and implementation of RBA efforts. Leaders must allocate funds, personnel, and time to the effort. Political and financial pressures can diminish support for the efforts over time, thus reducing the chances of successful design and implementation.

- ***Changing thinking takes time.*** Those who have been held accountable for following rules and regulations for their entire careers will not change their thinking overnight to a focus on results. Likewise, many people have seen various reform efforts implemented unsuccessfully and are skeptical of jumping on the bandwagon of something that may be short lived.

- ***No single RBA model exists.*** While some states and localities have a longer history of RBA than others, there is no single model that can be replicated across states and localities. As such, it takes time to design and implement an RBA effort that is tailored to the unique political, demographic, and social context of a particular state or community.

What is the Potential of RBA for Child and Family Services?

While RBA for child and family services is relatively new, enough experience exists to suggest how it can best be used. In its ideal form, RBA can be a useful tool for learning and continuous improvement. To be used in this way, RBA efforts should be designed and used to:

> In its ideal form, RBA can be a useful tool for learning and continuous improvement.

- Engage people in defining problems and solutions to them
- Help program managers and providers plan and manage
- Demonstrate results of investments in child and family services
- Promote innovation.

Challenges and solutions to the effective design and implementation of RBA efforts include the following:

• Engaging People in Defining Solutions to Problems

The *process* of developing an RBA effort can engage policymakers, service providers, public managers, and citizens in defining problems and solutions to them. Methods to engage citizens and relevant stakeholders in this process include public polling, citizen roundtables, community forums, and meetings with key leaders and stakeholders.

Challenge: *RBA efforts can increase fragmentation because different agencies, departments, and funders often have differing RBA requirements.*

Solution: Those charged with designing and implementing an RBA effort should assess what other efforts currently exist and what other planning efforts are underway. Policymakers, service providers, and other stakeholders should develop a strategic plan that describes a common vision and use this to establish priorities for conflicting RBA requirements. All of those involved in RBA should adjust expectations to recognize that although complete alignment will never be possible, agreement on a general framework should be an important goal.

Challenge: *Stakeholders involved in designing and implementing RBA can get "burned out" by the process since reaching consensus on goals and measures can be tedious and time consuming.*

Solution: It is important to spend time orienting stakeholders involved in RBA efforts and to set up work groups to examine technical issues. For example, Florida developed a standard set of definitions for RBA terms, and Minnesota developed training materials that translate jargon and explain the RBA process. Georgia and Ohio established work groups that discuss technical details and make recommendations to those making final decisions, rather than involving all stakeholders in technical deliberations.

• Helping Public Managers and Service Providers with Decision Making

The use of RBA data can help with decision making among public managers and service providers. Such data can help with monitoring progress toward achieving results. And, RBA data, coupled with program evaluation or other data, can be used to assess service strategies.

Challenge: *Training, technical assistance, and data collection and reporting capacity are often inadequate.*

Solution: Leveraging federal, state, and foundation resources can help ensure that training, technical assistance, and data capacity are available. The process of leveraging can be quite complicated,

but some states, such as Iowa and Vermont, have been successful by using foundation dollars targeted to improve child and family outcomes to enhance RBA training and technical assistance efforts.

- **Demonstrating Results of Investments in Child and Family Services**

To demonstrate the results of investments in child and family services, RBA data must be coupled with cost-benefit data produced through program evaluation. Nonetheless, RBA data can be used by programs and agencies to monitor progress toward achieving results.

Challenge: *RBA data can be misused in order to hold public managers and service providers accountable for results over which they have no control.*

Solution: To prevent misuse of RBA data, documents must indicate who is responsible for achieving results and should list factors beyond the control of public managers that could affect results. Minnesota and Oregon have included such factors in their RBA reports. In addition, training people to implement the system and use the data is essential. For example, North Carolina developed a training process for those responsible for implementing RBA systems, and Florida developed a training program for policymakers.

- **Promoting Innovation**

To reach its potential as a tool for continuous improvement, RBA must be used as an incentive for innovation rather than as a punitive measure. The process of developing RBA systems can help to identify and eliminate unnecessary barriers and can promote innovation.

Challenge: *Public managers and service providers may become frustrated when charged with identifying solutions to problems that they cannot implement due to constraints of existing rules and regulations.*

Solution: Policymakers and public managers should create processes for systematically examining barriers to achieving results. Committees that regularly review such barriers can identify and eliminate unnecessary regulations, while ensuring the continuation of necessary regulations governing quality, access, and equity. Ohio and Georgia have both set up such committees to review and eliminate unnecessary barriers.

Challenge: *Political, social, and demographic factors can impede the successful design and implementation of an RBA effort.*

> While no single RBA model exists, those charged with implementing RBA efforts can learn from states and communities with similar political, social, and demographic contexts.

Solution: While no single RBA model exists, those charged with implementing RBA efforts can learn from states and communities with similar political, social, and demographic contexts. RBA efforts must be tailored to take into account state and local governance structure as well as the relative power of the governor, legislature, agencies, and county commissioners. It is important to tailor RBA efforts to the size and demographic nature of the state: What works in a small state will not necessarily work in a large state, and must be modified to ensure that key stakeholders are involved in the process.

Challenge: *Adversaries can oppose an RBA effort simply for political reasons. This lack of support can jeopardize the effort.*

Solution: Cultivate bipartisan champions at a variety of levels. Iowa and Vermont have both developed state committees composed of diverse stakeholders to oversee their respective RBA efforts.

Challenge: *Legislative budget and appropriations committees, which are categorical in nature, may not use RBA data if they are not specifically relevant to their committee.*

Solution: Target RBA reports to different audiences and ensure that those targeted toward legislators are succinct, jargon-free, and relevant to legislative committees. North Carolina has taken this into account and has tailored its RBA reports to the legislature. Make sure RBA reports are also written in a way that will be useful to constituents as they attempt to influence the legislative process. Legislators report that RBA has the greatest impact when it is referred to them by their constituents.

Challenge: *Support for the RBA effort wanes after the early implementation phase.*

Solution: Build relationships among key stakeholders in the state and establish trust and widespread support for the effort. The states in our study report different methods of building on these relationships, but all report that these relationships are critical to the success of the effort.

Conclusion

RBA efforts have great potential as a tool to engage policymakers and public managers in continuous improvement of child and family services. Significant challenges exist, however. To ensure that RBA efforts reach their potential, those responsible for designing and implementing such efforts must:

- Set realistic expectations
- Engage stakeholders at a variety of levels in defining problems and solutions
- Incorporate training of public managers, service providers, and citizens about the process
- Design reports to be used by a variety of audiences
- Create systems for eliminating unnecessary barriers and for facilitating innovation
- Cultivate bipartisan support and champions at a variety of levels. ◆

Diane Schilder
Project Manager
HFRP

Interview with Harry Hatry and Joe Wholey

In 1993, the United States Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), mandating that each federal agency develop a strategic plan with outcome-related goals and objectives; develop annual performance plans with output- and outcome-related goals; and report annually on progress toward achievement of these. In the almost five years since the passage of this legislation, federal agencies have been working to develop planning and measurement systems to enable them to respond to the legislation and to help them achieve better results. The focus on performance measurement has not been limited to federal agencies; it has gained currency in state and local governments as well as foundation-funded programs and nonprofit organizations. Two individuals who have played key roles in the performance measurement movement are Joseph Wholey and Harry Hatry. Joe Wholey is Professor of Public Administration at the University of Southern California and Senior Advisor on Evaluation Methodology at the U.S. General Accounting Office. Harry Hatry is a Principal Research Associate and Program Director at the State Policy Center of The Urban Institute. We asked them to reflect on some of the lessons learned from the federal implementation of GPRA and the other results-based work they have seen.

1) What have been some of the key factors influencing the success of performance measurement systems?

Wholey: Executive leadership is key. You need people who believe in setting outcome-oriented goals and who are trying to aim their organizations in that direction. This requires that they consistently demonstrate their belief and commitment to it — not just one time. Some executives hold "how are we doing" sessions which examine what the data are and what they mean and what action to take. These continually reinforce that the executive is interested.

Hatry: At the federal level, one of the unique features has been support from both the Congress and the Executive, both political parties, and the Office of Management and Budget, and the General Accounting Office (GAO). This bipartisan support is remarkable and distinguishes the current work from previous budgetary and management reform efforts. We recognize that this is not the case in many results efforts. Where bipartisan support may not exist, a law on the books is helpful, although it is no guarantee.

Wholey: People who take this seriously also start looking hard at the way organization does business. This is the concept of "alignment." Some people say that those organizations that really get into performance measurement find

IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS ACT

Enacted in 1993, the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) requires federal agencies to develop strategic plans describing their goals and objectives, annual performance plans identifying measures of progress, and performance reports describing agency progress in meeting standards and measures. Agency strategic plans were submitted to Congress and OMB in September. Agency performance plans are currently being released. Agency performance reports will be released annually, beginning in March 2000.

A variety of organizations have been following implementation of GPRA and have issued reports and established Web sites to disseminate information about GPRA. These include:

American Society for Public Administration Center for Accountability and Performance, http://www.aspanet.org/cap
Includes federal case studies

The Congressional Institute, http://server.conginst.org/conginst/results
Provides ongoing information about GPRA

Freedom Works, http://freedom.house.gov/results
The Home Page of the Office of House Majority Leader Dick Armey; includes a "grading" of agency strategic plans

Government Executive Magazine, http://www.govexec.com/reinvent/
"Reinvention Center" providing information on GPRA and other government reinvention activities

National Academy of Public Administration, Center for Improving Government Performance, http://www.napawash.org/
Highlights the activities of the Performance Consortium

National Partnership for Reinventing Government (formerly National Performance Review), http://www.npr.gov/initiati/
Provides a growing collection of current documents to help people with an interest in results-oriented government

OMBWatch, http://www.obmwatch.org/www/ombw/gpra/
Offers news and analysis of GPRA

U.S. Chief Financial Officers Council, GPRA Implementation Committee, http://www.financenet.gov/financenet/fed/cfo/gpra/
Includes information on management, budgeting, and accounting related to GPRA

that the current way of doing business is not the right way to do business. They find they must reexamine the organization, the functions of the organization, the way the organization manages itself, and manages its systems, such as personnel and budgeting. Who takes responsibility for data is just one of the many things that is reexamined if people say they are going to succeed in achieving outcome goals.

Hatry: If you want to embed managing by results into an organization, you really need to decentralize it. The program manager has to be responsible for outcome information. This does not mean that they themselves collect it, but they have to be responsible for those data. However, you do not want to decentralize too much. For example, I think most organizations probably need some sort of central technical group who can provide technical assistance and some quality oversight to program people. This might be the evaluation people, those who are experts in measurement. For example, a federal or state agency may have twenty programs, and each wants customer surveys. The twenty should not do it all themselves. A central group could provide advice, check the questions, and maybe even manage the administration of the surveys.

Wholey: In some agencies "partnerships for results" are emerging. The Coast Guard is a good example of this. The agency is holding itself accountable for safety in the coastal waters. By examining data, the agency learned that the primary problem was with tugboats. Further analysis revealed that the problem with tugboats was not their equipment, but rather their operation. As a result, the Coast Guard has focused less on inspections and has formed an alliance with the tugboat industry to improve the training of tugboat operators.

2) What have been some of the key constraints that agencies have faced in designing and implementing performance measurement systems?

Hatry: Use of information has been, in general, a major weak spot. The focus to date has been on accountability and not managing for results. This is the issue Joe and I keep coming back to. Until that focus is changed, getting managers to collect information that is useful to them will not occur.

> ...we have to get managers and legislators to be reasonable and constructive in the way that they handle information.

Wholey: To address this, you that need to look for opportunities to create incentives. Some United Ways are trying to do this by using multi-year grants. The hope is that funded agencies will do more reporting on results and less filling out of grant applications. Multi-year performance-based contracts with providers is another approach. In the United Way's National Learning Project Evaluation we are finding that some of the leading United Ways are focusing their training on helping people to use performance information to improve program quality and to communicate the value of the program to those outside the agency. In the public sector as well, being able to communicate the value of what programs do is a big deal, so it is important to show managers how to explain what their program accomplishes and to have actual data to show what the program accomplishes. Legislatures are properly skeptical — everyone has a wonderful program. Being able to have some evidence of what you produce is of value in the environment of tight resources we currently face.

Hatry: A major concern is what happens when the news is bad. Managers today at all levels fear the results of all of this. This is something I encounter at all levels — that program managers do not trust others to use the data properly. This is probably because they know that it is usually the negative people who don't like their program who will pick up any data they have. All of this is a two-edged sword, and somehow we have to get managers and legislators to be reasonable and constructive in the way that they handle information. That continues to emerge as one of the key problems that may occur. If the data are used only to batter the

Continued on page 15

SIX CHALLENGES TO MAKING GPRA WORK

Remarks by Vice President Al Gore at the Government Performance and Results Act Conference

On April 23, 1998, the Council for Excellence in Government sponsored a conference on the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) at which Vice President Gore spoke about the five years since the passage of GPRA. He noted that federal government agencies have prepared strategic plans and developed measures of progress and stressed that the next challenge is to "make the act work." To do this, the Vice President suggested that:

(1) There is a need to focus oversight and management attention on outcomes and asking customers what is important, and how well they think agencies are doing.

(2) There is a need to develop a set of common visions, goals, and measures that reach across organizational boundaries and use the resources and energy of many agencies to solve complex problems.

(3) Information technology is key. Technology can deliver services across agency boundaries, provide real-time information on performance, and allow more one-stop shopping.

(4) In the long run, shared accountability means rethinking the traditional decision-making process that centers around the budget. This might mean moving to a biennial budget and focusing more of the policy debate on performance rather than budget.

(5) There is a need to create incentives so leaders aren't just required to do the right thing, they want to do it. This might mean the creation of performance-based organizations which create incentives for employees to be customer-focused and results-based and would grant agencies greater flexibility from rules in order to help them achieve results.

(6) In the long run, there is a need to rethink how the government reorganizes to deliver its services. This would mean building agencies — and a congressional committee structure — that work more on horizontal than vertical lines.

Building Support for Statewide Outcomes: Lessons from Florida

For the past five years, the Florida Commission on Government Accountability to the People (GAP), a 15-member citizen panel with four staff operating independently within state government, has produced public reports on outcomes. One report, *The Florida Benchmarks*, is a series of quantitative indicators that describe the well-being of Florida citizens across seven areas of concern: families and communities; safety; learning; health; economy; environment; and government. Its companion publication, *Critical Benchmark Goals*, identifies statewide goals for the years 2000 and 2010 for sixty of the most important indicators, including children in poverty, racial harmony, child abuse and neglect, and infant mortality.

We have worked to publicize and garner support for the measures using a variety of strategies:

- ***Public hearings:*** To give citizens an opportunity to shape the benchmarks, the Commission held public hearings in five cities around the state. Because the benchmarks were a new idea, few people attended the meetings or understood what they were to be. However, some early contacts were productive. For example, GAP worked with Joint Venture South Florida, a nonprofit organization developing a long-term economic vision with a set of measures like the benchmarks for five South Florida counties.

  In establishing goals for the critical benchmarks, we focused on involving citizen leaders and citizen groups. We used a modified Delphi approach in which we asked 95 organizations around the state to submit up to 10 names of people actively involved in one or more of the benchmark areas. We then sent out a survey to approximately 2000 of these people, providing trends and comparative data on the critical benchmarks and asking respondents to help us set a goal for where Florida should be in 2000 and 2010. We received 700 responses, some quite impassioned, particularly about education and crime. By involving people who are active in their communities in this way, we were able to increase our citizen base even more.

- ***Press conferences and editorial board meetings:*** We have used press conferences and press releases to advertise the reports. We realize, however, that even the best laid plans don't always materialize — on the day we released the 1996 benchmarks, we were trumped by singer Gloria Estefan, who made a whirlwind visit to the Capitol to advocate for boat safety. We have also developed relationships with editorial boards and have found that the quality of life measures fit nicely with the issues that editors discuss. We have written Letters to the Editor and community editorials, which have been carried in all parts of the state. We visit or call editors when we have a new report or a finding that they might find interesting. Our support comes from all political spectrums; both conservative and liberal editorial writers have praised the purpose and content of the benchmarks.

We have also developed relationships with editorial boards and have found that the quality of life measures fit nicely with the issues that editors discuss.

- ***Widespread distribution:*** The benchmarks have been distributed widely to state elected officials and state agencies, as well as to the more than 1500 organizations that lobby the Florida legislature. In addition, the benchmarks were sent to all mayors, city councils, city managers, county commissioners, school boards, and media outlets. In 1996, the benchmarks were made available in every public library, and a poster advertising the Goals Report was sent to every library in 1997.

- ***Involvement of civic and business community:*** The idea of a GAP Commission came from the state's Florida Council of 100, a leading business organization composed of the top private sector CEOs in the state. The Council has actively supported the Commission whenever it has run into political trouble and is an important source of sustained advocacy for statewide outcomes and the reports. Our commissioners, who are from different parts of the state, have sought speaking engagements with civic and business organizations. In turn, these entities have used the benchmarks for comparative data in reaching their own organizational goals. Additionally, we have been supported by the state's Chamber of Commerce, which uses our publication in its Leadership Florida program and has given us statewide publicity through its newsletter. We have also contacted each of the major advocacy organizations in the state and requested mention in their newsletters, and in some cases, have written articles for their publications.

- ***Support for local benchmarking groups:*** We formed an early informal alliance with the Jacksonville Community Council, Inc., which has published quality of life indicators since 1985. Subsequently, we have generated at least three other local efforts in large metropolitan counties. We have provided technical assistance to them and to some smaller counties which have developed community reports. We have found that local community groups have been our most important allies in this effort, enabling us to build a political base across the

state. Legislators are much more likely to listen to their local constituents' opinions than they are to a small state government agency like GAP. Thus, the support of these local quality of life indicator publishers has been invaluable.

The Commission has worked hard to develop a multi-pronged dissemination approach and has been delighted with who uses our report and why: middle school teachers because they have nothing else current on Florida; community colleges in their grant proposals to support funding requests; nonprofits to set organizational goals for their boards; university graduate classes in performance measurement and strategic planning; and editorial boards to back up their arguments.

The greatest challenge we have faced is t : garner the support of legislators and their staffs. We have found that while legislators use the benchmarks for civic club speeches and for reference during ten months of the year, during the 60 day session, their concern is with agency operations and specific assistance they can receive in making funding decisions. Social indicators seem like distant sentinels when the question is whether or not to keep an agricultural marketing program in a rural county. Indicative of this is the fact that the 1998 Florida Legislature cut all funding for the GAP Commission. An effort is underway to continue its work outside state government. ◆

Karen Stanford
Executive Director
Florida Commission on Government Accountability to the People

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Evaluation Options for Family Resource Centers
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[EVALOP] 112 pages. $10.00

Do You Really Want to Be Accountable for Results? Musings on Georgia's Learnings

The call for accountability rings throughout every hall, from United Way Boards to county commissioners to legislatures. But, accountable for what, with what tools, and with what systems? How do we use results to inform decision-makers, whether those decisions affect policies, operations, or budgets? Many of us wander into this accountability world with uninformed optimism, engage the best thinkers in designing new tools and systems, and then wonder why we hit so many walls in trying to implement results accountability.

Georgia's experience in approaching results accountability has taught us many lessons, of which the most important has been "don't embark on this bold journey without some appreciation and readiness for the complexity of change that will be required." We have learned that you must be deliberate in planning for this journey, mapping out the route, preparing traveling partners, and selecting a pathfinder. You need to know what your destination is, and you must also be willing to engage in the work and invest in the human and financial capital required to get there. Georgia's experience has resulted in four major lessons:

Many of us wander into this accountability world with uninformed optimism, engage the best thinkers in designing new tools and systems, and then wonder why we hit so many walls in trying to implement results accountability.

1) Ensure that there is buy-in from top leadership from the outset. The system and policy changes required will not occur without the authority required to sustain the changes. This is even more crucial if you are looking at cross-system results that require shared accountability.

2) Recruit dedicated staff to this initiative; it cannot be managed part-time or on top of full-time responsibilities. Consider the functions that need to be managed: steering, guiding consultants, implementation, and building local capacity to manage in the long term.

3) Use outside technical assistance to build local and state capacity to sustain results accountability. Approach this in a manner that teaches new skills and concepts to staff; involves governing bodies fully in designing and using the new decision systems; directs resources to this work; and increases leadership buy-in to the efforts throughout the process.

4) Understand the complexity of this endeavor. Results-based change means more than rhetoric; it goes to the core of how you operate, how you set policy, and how you make funding decisions.

If you understand the above lessons, you will be able to make informed decisions about the consultants and technical assistance to help you implement a results-based system. Georgia has been fortunate — our consultants have added significant value to the work and have helped design conceptual and operational models and new decision support systems, all within a learning environment that is patient, al-

lows for missteps, and rewards breakthroughs.

In order to ensure strong and effective consultant partnerships, our experience shows that those involved in developing a results-based system for their state, locality, or organization must consider the following:

1) Your responsibility

Be clear about your vision for a results-based accountability system and conduct a systemic assessment of the capabilities that need to be developed. Consider the following questions:

- What is the current view of evaluation among stakeholders? Is the mindset one of after-the-fact "got-you" or is it one of developing ongoing information to improve decision making?

- What is the state-of-the-art in information systems? Is the information provided that which decision makers need in order to be accountable for results? Can cross-system information as well as individual program information be produced?

- What models exist for interpreting the data across information systems?

- What capacity exists at the local and state levels for understanding, implementing, and using results-based decision models?

- What models need to be developed that help decision makers translate new information into operational, policy, or investment decisions?

2) Consultant's competencies

Search for consultants who can design and foster new concepts. Results accountability is not a bag of tricks — it requires new thinking and new skills. Through interviews and references, determine if the consultant can:

- Jointly develop and tailor the approach with the customer. There are no standard prototypes for results accountability.

- Understand the different audiences in any one community or state that are key stakeholders in building accountability systems. These can include, among others, the boards, the executive leadership, the information systems staff, front-line workers, and audit/budget staff.

- Use the learning process to develop buy-in for the changes required. Consultants should help create an environment that fosters a willingness to modify plans as those involved in the effort learn what works.

- Understand the change process and ways of managing reactions to the threats and opportunities that develop. The consultant concurrently should be able to think holistically and systemically, recognizing the origins of current behaviors.

- Use the process to increase understanding, capacity, and ownership of shared accountability. A valued consultant partner will work with the varied personalities to build ownership.

Determining the consultant's competencies is difficult, but critical. These competencies could become part of your solicitation, by requesting the party to provide references or evidence of his or her approach to working with customers.

Be clear about your vision for a results-based accountability system and conduct a systemic assessment of the capabilities that need to be developed.

3) Previous consultant work

A request for a proposal should also address the consultant's experience with results accountability: What has he or she done to design new models? We in Georgia have yet to identify any individual, organization, community, or state that has implemented new accountability systems that are cross-system, community-based, and user friendly. We are all in the design phase, so look for evidence of thoughtful experimentation rather than for a perfect solution.

You might want to request the following from any potential consultant:

- Models of conceptual and operational results-based accountability systems

- Examples of partnering with multiple stakeholders in fostering joint planning, assessment, and evaluation

- Examples of an ability to tailor technical assistance to political and operational realities

- Examples of tools developed to create a system of accountability

- Approaches to building capacity to sustain the changes independent of the consultant

- Descriptions of past work, including scope and role as a consultant for results accountability; publications; and, individual references from community, state, and national partners.

Since 1991, Georgia has been creating new community collaboratives willing to develop shared accountability. The communities and the state have been deliberate in being responsible for results accountability since 1994, developing new conceptual models, redesigning information systems, reconfiguring governance structures, and designing new decision systems. Georgia attempts to do this within a no-blame learning environment. The Georgia partners are proud of our progress over the past years, but we also understand that we have much to learn. We welcome the knowledge, advice, and support of our many national partners in these efforts. Results accountability is no quick fix but, in the long term, it will provide a means of assessing the effectiveness of our public and private investments in better results for children and families. ◆

Janet S. Bittner
Family and Children Coordinator
The Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia

Upcoming Evaluation Conferences

The following identifies some of the upcoming conferences focusing on evaluation methods, theories, and use.

Organization	Contact Information	Description
Center for Improving Government Performance, National Academy of Public Administration *"Helpful Practices in Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act"* June 30-July 1, 1998 Washington, DC	Tel: (202) 216-7866 National Academy of Public Administration 800 North Capital Street, NW Suite 115 Washington, DC 20002	The conference will feature sessions on strategic and annual planning; performance measurement in cross-cutting environments; and integrating budgets with strategic plans and programs. Exhibits and demonstrations by experts on helping agencies fulfill planning, measurement, and reporting requirements will also be presented.
The Evaluator's Institute July 20-25, 1998 Washington, DC	http://www.erols.com/cwisler Tel: (301) 390-0743 Fax: (301) 390-0091 2739 Woodlake Road Mitchellville, MD 20721	The Evaluator's Institute will offer courses ranging from basic to advanced evaluation methods and theories, and will appeal to the needs of three audiences: those who want to learn how to conduct evaluations, practicing evaluators who want to learn a new skill, and nonevaluators who find themselves involved in evaluation tasks.
Australasian Evaluation Society *"Evaluation — Investing in our Future"* October 7-9, 1998 Melbourne, Victoria, Australia	http://www.meetingplanners.com.au/evalution Tel: 02-8282-3320 Fax: 02-6282-3058 Australasian Evaluation Society PO Box 448 Curtin, ACT 2605	The conference will address the theme of *"Evaluation — Investing in our Future"* with speakers and presentations examining the use of evaluation in multiple fields including education, global issues, health, government and human resources. Evaluation training will also be provided to conference participants.
American Evaluation Association *"Transforming Society through Evaluation"* November 4-7, 1998 Chicago, IL	http://www.eval.org Tel: (301) 251-7700 AEA Central Office 401 East Jefferson Street Suite 205 Rockville, MD 20850	Workshops and discussions will focus on answering questions such as, "What are the dangers of casting evaluation as a transformative agent," and "How can we strengthen our evaluation practice and theories so that we can achieve the goal of transforming society?" Please call for more information.

National Learning Project Evaluation

Background

Primary responsibility for addressing social needs is presently undergoing a dramatic shift in the United States. Local communities — and particularly the nonprofit human service organizations within those communities — are being asked to assume an increasingly larger share of the burden. At the same time, human service programs are under increased scrutiny by government, philanthropic, and corporate funders, all of whom are demanding demonstrable results. United Ways (UW) are also being challenged to show their added value to local community improvement efforts.

Supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., the United Way of America (UWA) has initiated the National Learning Project (NLP) to assess the use of program outcome information t seven UW sites that have compiled program outcome information.

NLP Sites

Asheville, NC	Minneapolis, MN
Dayton, OH	New Orleans, LA
Indianapolis, IN	Rochester, NY
Milwaukee, WI	

In addition to site selection, UWA has supported the NLP by convening the seven NLP UWs in July and December 1996; creating a private electronic board on UW Online for project managers at NLP UWs; conducting focus groups at six of the seven sites; and contracting for the development of "theories of change" or "logic models" for each of the participating UWs.

The UWs participating in the NLP expect to gain the following:

- National technical assistance and consultation based on the needs they identify
- Support for networking among themselves

National recognition as leaders in measuring program outcomes and achieving community impact.

In particular, NLP participants expect to benefit from a national evaluation that provides — on a real-time basis — ongoing documentation of progress and sharing of lessons learned. Knowledge gained from these sites will be used to assist the larger group of UWs in advancing faster and further along the road to full implementation of an outcomes approach. In turn, the expected improvements in UW-sponsored programs will contribute to an improved quality of life in the local communities receiving these services.

Evaluation Description

To help realize useful information from the NLP, the evaluation is a qualitative assessment that embodies several operational purposes: 1) to analyze how sites differ in approaches and objectives in relation to their past progress and current environment; 2) to monitor each site's implementation of workplans, including shifts in approaches and objectives, and reasons for those shifts; 3) to assess each site's achievement of activities, outputs, and outcomes; 4) to compare the results of different strategies used to attain similar objectives; 5) to assess the role of external and internal factors that affect each UW's progress and shifts in plans; 6) to compare progress across sites to find insights that might benefit sites' efforts to advance toward their objectives; and 7) to share (transfer) the cumulative learnings with other, non-NLP UWs.

Work on the evaluation project began in May 1997, and will extend over 32 months to a completion date of December 1999. Since the seven sites are at different stages of outcome implementation, baseline reports in the form of case studies are being completed for each site, with a baseline synthesis report on all sites to follow. Over the course of the project, annual reports for each site will provide updated information on implementation progress. The evaluation will conclude with a final cross-site report that looks across all phases of the project.

Selected Points and Next Steps

At a December 1997 meeting of UWs, selected points about outcome measurement implementation experiences derived from baseline case studies across the seven NLP sites were presented. These points included the following:

- Implementation took more effort and a longer period of time than expected
- Every site employed a phased/incremental approach
- Although improvements in the results of programs and program design were undoubtedly occurring, there were few concrete examples and no systematic tallies
- NLP sites had to invent many new tools in the area of defining expected results of individual programs
- The demands placed on volunteers and staff changed dramatically
- Bridging to community impact remained an unresolved issue for sites seeking improvements in the status of the community.

At that same meeting, the following were listed as the next steps for NLP sites:

- Planning for and demonstrating community impact
- Enlisting collaboration of funding partners, especially government agencies that are the largest funders in the community priority areas
- Monitoring changes in the perceptions of UW by the community/public
- Demonstrating improvements in programs/systems (independent of whether changes in community status occur). ◆

Jay Bell
Project Director
National Learning Project Evaluation

The NLP evaluation is being conducted by Jay Bell of James Bell Associates, and Joe Wholey and John McLaughlin of the USC Washington Center. For information, contact James Bell Associates, Inc., 2111 Wilson Blvd. Suite 1120, Arlington, VA 22201.

Ensuring Quality in Head Start: The FACES Study

As the nation's premier early childhood education program, Head Start is leading the way in developing and reporting on its accountability for comprehensive services to approximately 800,000 children and their families each year. Head Start has developed an outcome-oriented accountability system, which combines scientific research with program-level reporting and monitoring, and is based on a consensus-driven set of criteria for program accountability.

The Head Start Program Performance Measures Initiative is a response to a specific legislative mandate, strategic planning for Head Start, and broader public emphasis on accountability and results-oriented evaluation. Measures were developed in accordance with the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion, the Head Start Act, and the Government Performance and Results Act.

The Conceptual Framework

In 1995, Head Start undertook a consensus-building process involving Head Start program staff and parents, early childhood organization representatives, researchers, experts in the education, child development and early intervention fields, and federal officials. A conceptual framework was developed to display the linkages between process and outcome measures for Head Start children and families. The ultimate goal of Head Start is to promote the social competence of children, defined as the child's everyday effectiveness in dealing with his or her present environment and later responsibilities in school and life. Social competence is depicted at the top of a pyramid, with five objectives supporting it:

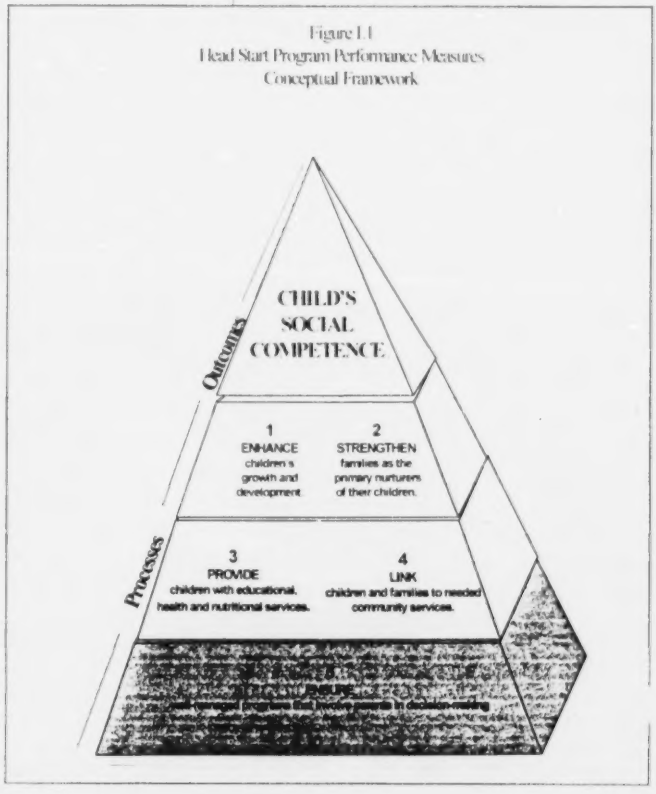
1) Enhance children's healthy growth and development
2) Strengthen families as the primary nurturers of their children
3) Provide children with educational, health, and nutritional services
4) Link children and families to needed community services
5) Ensure well-managed programs that involve parents in decision making.

An important aspect of the pyramid is the strong empirical connection between the provision of quality services (process measures) and improvements in child development (outcome measures). Each Program Performance Measure has performance indicators that specify how the measure will be assessed. For example, the objective "Enhancing children's healthy growth and development" includes as one performance measure: "Head Start children demonstrate improved emergent literacy, numeracy, and language skills." The performance indicator for this measure is the change in the Head Start children's emergent literacy, numeracy, and language skills over the Head Start year, measured by individual child assessments and parent and teacher reports of the child's abilities. A more process-oriented measure is: "Head Start assures that children receive needed medical, dental, and mental health services." The performance indicator for this measure is the number and percent of Head Start children who received needed medical services as reported by the programs themselves. In order to provide annual progress reports on the indicators supporting each of the objectives, data will be drawn from agency level sources, such as the Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) — a program-level reporting system completed by each Head Start program annually — and program monitoring reports, as well as from the classroom, teacher, family, and child level.

The Outcome Study

Most of the outcome data are being collected from the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), a longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of Head Start programs, classrooms, teachers, parents, and children examining the quality and effects of Head Start. FACES is being conducted by a team of researchers under contract to the Research, Demonstration and Evaluation Branch, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Service

Figure 1.1
Head Start Program Performance Measures
Conceptual Framework



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The Spring 1997 field test of FACES on a national probability sample of 2400 children and families in 40 programs collected extensive information about the quality of the educational services using classroom observations and interviews with teachers and administrators. FACES measured the abilities of Head Start children on a variety of child development constructs using direct child assessment, observation, and parent and teacher reports. These measures, often with nationally normed comparison data available, tapped abilities in emergent literacy, numeracy, and language skills; general cognitive skills, gross and fine motor skills; attitudes toward learning; social behavior and emotional well-being; and physical health. In addition, parents were interviewed about their life experiences, and involvement and satisfaction with Head Start. Classrooms were assessed on scheduling, the early childhood learning environment, and teacher behavior. Research has consistently linked program quality variables such as child:adult ratio, group size, responsiveness of teacher-child interaction, and richness of learning environments to improved child outcomes. For the first time using a national sample, FACES is testing the same linkages in Head Start. It is expected that higher quality Head Start programs will have children showing higher levels of skills and, over time, displaying greater gains in developmental outcomes.

Next Steps

Because of its unique opportunity to collect longitudinal child outcome data tied to program quality, FACES continued with Fall 1997 and Spring 1998 data collections on a nationally representative sample of 3,200 children and families in the same 40 programs. These phases will allow for a pre-post comparison, assessing the effects of Head Start by examining children and parents before their exposure to Head Start and determining their status at the end of the program. The Spring 1998 data collection will also examine a cohort of former Head Start children from the original field test sample who are completing kindergarten, to determine how they have performed in their first year of school. A Spring 1999 FACES data collection will examine results after kindergarten for the Fall 1997 Head Start cohort. Analyses of the Fall 1997-Spring 1998 comparisons will be available in late 1998.

Additional efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of Head Start are also underway. A consortium of four Quality Research Centers (QRCs) was established in 1995 to collaborate with local Head Start programs and the federal Head Start Bureau to define, assess, and verify the effectiveness of high-quality program practices in Head Start programs. On January 1, 1998, revised Head Start Program Performance Standards were implemented. These regulations delineate the operations and quality of services to be offered by all Head Start programs. Concurrently, the Head Start program monitoring system is being revised to streamline the process, and promote greater consistency and reliability across HHS regions. The training and technical assistance system has also been recently redesigned. ◆

Ruth Hubbell McKey
Vice President for Research and Program Services
Ellsworth Associates, Inc.

Louisa B. Tarullo
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Performance Measures Progress Reports are available on the Head Start Bureau Web page: www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb or can be requested by fax: (703) 683-5769; or e-mail: hspmc6@mail.idt.net

The evaluators for the Head Start FACES Study are Nicholas Zill and Gary Resnick of Westat, Inc.; David Connell of Abt Associates; Ruth Hubbell McKey of Ellsworth Associates; Robert O'Brien of The CDM Group. Federal project officers are Louisa B. Tarullo and Henry M. Doan of the Research, Demonstration and Evaluation Branch, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For further information, please contact Louisa B. Tarullo via e-mail: lbtarullo@acf.dhhs.gov

NEW RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY PUBLICATIONS FROM HFRP

Results-Based Accountability Case Studies

New evidence from recent studies by HFRP shows that RBA can be a powerful tool to initiate and enhance systems of continuous improvement and learning. These case studies describe RBA efforts in eight states: Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, and Vermont. Each case study identifies the process of designing and implementing RBA systems. Every report includes a description of state and local RBA efforts, their history, the development process, the uses of the RBA systems, and the lessons learned. The unique experiences of the eight states in the studies can provide valuable insights to those responsible for RBA efforts elsewhere in the nation.

Aiming for Accountability: Lessons Learned from Eight States

This report highlights some of the important lessons in designing and developing RBA based on the insights gained from the studies of eight states. Included is information about how these states have overcome some of the challenges in developing effective RBA systems, and what the characteristics of promising RBA efforts are. The executive summary of this report is a new addition to our collection of Reaching Results Briefs, and discusses the potential and limitations of RBA systems based on HFRP's eight case studies.

To obtain these publications, please contact the HFRP publications department at (617) 496-4304.

We regret that we cannot provide copies of the materials listed below. Please contact the publisher or authoring organization directly.

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. (1997). *Measuring outcomes: Practical applications for human services.* Findings, 1 (3). Saint Paul, MN: Author. This edition of the quarterly newsletter from the Wilder Foundation focuses on the practical aspects of how human services and educational organizations use outcome evaluation information to improve the effectiveness of their services. *Tel: (612) 333-4220. Wilder Research Center, 1295 Bandana Boulevard North, Suite 210, St. Paul, MN 55108.*

Ammons, David N. (1996). *Municipal benchmarks: Assessing local performance and establishing community standards.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. This book explores the design of practical performance measurement systems, the improvement of existing systems, and the establishment of local performance standards. *Tel: (805) 499-9774. http://www.sagepub.com*

Brown, Brett & Corbett, Thomas. (1997). *Social indicators and policy in the age of devolution.* Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty and School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin-Madison. This paper discusses how devolution and other changes in public administration have increased the importance of social indicators as public policy tools and how the new focus on results requires a sophisticated use of what are broadly thought of as social indicators. *http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/srlist.htm*

Friedman, Mark. (1997). *A guide to developing and using performance measures in results-based budgeting.* Washington, DC: The Finance Project. This paper addresses the challenge of how to be accountable for the best possible performance, while ensuring that performance is aligned with overall efforts to improve results. *http://www.financeproject.org/measures.html*

Hauser, Robert M., Brown, Brett V., & Prosser, William R., Eds. (1997). *Indicators of children's well-being.* New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation. Essays by experts in multiple disciplines assess how data on physical development, education, economic security, family and neighborhood conditions, and social behavior are collected and analyzed; what findings they reveal; and what improvements are needed to create a more comprehensive and policy-relevant system of measurement. *Tel: (800) 524-6401. RSF Publications Office, 112 East 64th Street, New York, NY 10021-7383.*

Koshel, Jeff. (1997). *Indicators as tools for managing and evaluating programs at the national, state and local levels of government: Practical and theoretical issues.* Washington, DC: Child Trends, Inc. This paper surveys the variety of ways indicators are used by public officials and program administrators to measure performance and discusses the characteristics that indicators should have in order to meet management and planning needs. *Tel: (202) 362-5580. Child Trends, Inc., 4301 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20008.*

McDaniel, Nancy & Alsop, Robyn. (1997). *Fifth national roundtable on outcomes measures in child welfare services: Summary of proceedings.* Englewood, CO: American Humane Association. Looking at emerging trends in child welfare and the impact on outcomes measurement, this report on the recent roundtable discussion includes information on federal requirements influencing outcomes measurement, linking interventions through research, and assessing outcomes across service systems and the community; criteria for selecting outcome indicators; and characteristics of successful outcomes initiatives. *Tel: (303) 792-9900. American Humane Association, Children's Division, 63 Inverness Drive East, Englewood, CO 80112-5117.*

Schachter, Hindy Lauer. (1996). *Reinventing government or reinventing ourselves: The role of citizen owners in making a better government.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. This book offers a new perspective on the movement to reinvent government, arguing that citizens should be viewed as owners of government rather than as customers, and demonstrating that a reinvigorated public is essential to increasing agency efficiency and responsiveness. *Tel: (800) 666-2211. Fax: (800) 688-2877. State University of New York Press, c/o CUP Services, PO Box 6525, Ithaca, NY 14851.*

United States General Accounting Office. (1996). *Executive guide: Effectively implementing the Government Performance and Results Act.* Washington, DC: Author. This report studies several public sector organizations successfully pursuing management reform initiatives and becoming more results-oriented. It discusses three key steps and important practices to implementing reform. Document *#GGD-96-118. http://www.gao.gov/reports.htm*

United Way. (1997). *Measuring program outcomes: A practical approach.* Alexandria, VA: Author. This handbook is a complete resource for health, human services, and youth and family serving agencies, offering guidance and step-by-step strategies for specifying program outcomes, developing measurable indicators, identifying data sources and data collection methods, analyzing and reporting findings, and using outcome information. *Tel: (800) 772-0008. http://www.unitedway.org*

Wandersman, Abraham, et al. (1998, Forthcoming). *Comprehensive quality programming: Eight essential strategies for implementing successful prevention programs.* Journal of Primary Prevention. This article presents strategies that can be used to improve the practice of prevention programs, with a focus on the strategies of youth and family prevention programs. A series of eight specific strategies, referred to as

Comprehensive Quality Programming, and an overview of an effective method for using such strategies to improve programs continously are included.

Yates, Jessica. (1997). *Performance management in human services.* Washington, DC: The Welfare Information Network. Performance measurement systems have grown increasingly relevant to both government and private organizations providing child, family, and human services. This paper examines the work of several states taking the lead in managing for performance and discusses the lessons learned. *http://www.welfareinfor.org/perfman.htm* ◆

Jessica Chapel
Editorial Assistant
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Questions and Answers
Continued from page 6

agencies, then we have a problem. To alleviate this problem, there should be an explicit provision stating that when a performance report is provided, explanatory information must accompany it (giving the agency managers the opportunity to tell their side of the story.

Wholey: I believe we should reorient our concept of performance measurement to include three things: 1) annual (or more frequent) numerical information; 2) annual (or more frequent) narrative assessment of what is being accomplished; 3) program evaluation studies to give a fuller picture of what the program produces and to address the knotty questions of whether the program makes a difference.

3) Now that the performance measurement building blocks are in place in many agencies, what are the next steps?

Hatry: Getting managers to use the information is very important although very difficult to achieve. You need to get regular feedback into the system so managers can make changes, and this is still one of the major uncertainties we have today.

Wholey: Some of the organizations that have been collecting outcome data for some time are taking the second step, which is to begin to understand these data in terms of degree of difficulty. This is designed to discourage "creaming." One means by which they are doing this is to group programs or organizations with similar characteristics together when assessing performance. This has been done in education, where schools with similar characteristics (such as student socio-economic status) are compared with one another. Another way to do this comparison is by using a regression model; this is done in job training where local economic conditions and client characteristics are taken into account. The point is that, for those working in a tougher situation, performance scores need to be treated more kindly, while those working in less difficult situations should be held to a higher standard of performance.

Hatry: Performance partnerships, where different organizations work together to achieve results, are a promising approach. This is almost inherently necessary in human services since upper levels of government typically do not deliver direct services. The indicators that really mean something are contributed to by many different parties. A family services program may have federal, state, and local policies, monies, and community entities. Through these partnerships, people start to realize that to improve outcomes is not the responsibility of one agency or one level of government — it is shared.

Wholey: Performance partnerships have many interesting features. But, at a more technical level, there is the issue of a common set of indicators. Many funders are enthusiastic about performance-based approaches but what each wants is different. It would be useful to have some national agreement on common indicators in the human services area. To do this would require a two-step process. First, you need agreement on what the goals are. It is a mistake to go to the measures first. At this point, you can also think about how to use performance information once you have it and what kind of incentive systems you want. Second, you need agreement on sensible measures of progress.

Hatry: Another issue that is going to come up is the quality control issue, and that has not yet been faced up to — once you have a performance measurement system in place, how do you retain and oversee the quality? Will Congress trust the agencies' numbers? With a grain of salt — they will rely on GAO. It is very important to try to address data quality at all levels (program level, upper management, and legislature) once you have the system in place.

Wholey: Typically, there is going to be more than one measurement system. Managers can use less valid information because they have other clues as to what is going on. Policymakers are further away, and they typically will want more validation of the information. I have spent my whole life working on utility of performance information as more important than validity and reliability issues — both sets of issues have to be faced and ought to be faced. In Canada, the Office of Auditor General has taken the position that it wants to see managers use the information to try to improve their programs and that a lot of the other things will get worked out. If managers use the information in their work, managers become concerned with the quality of the information.

Hatry: It is extremely important that people who will be involved in this sort of thing get acclimated to it as early as possible. This begins in the universities. We need to focus on the importance of the concept of government-by-results, and results-based performance measurement in universities and inservice training. This will help people understand the outcome focus and inculcate the values and understanding needed to create the culture change required of a results-based approach.

Wholey: We can also advance things if, at a central level, we create suitable incentive systems for better results. Bonuses on the basis of results achieved is one way — the Department of Health and Human Services is experimenting with this in the context of welfare reform. But financial bonuses are not always necessary. You can do a lot with partial deregulation or more onerous supervision as rewards and penalties. I think that getting measures and using the information to try to do better is important and that the creation of intangible incentive systems is an important way to get that to happen. ◆

Karen Horsch
Research Associate
HFRP

American Evaluation Association
http://www.eval.org
The Web site of the professional association for evaluators, the American Evaluation Association (AEA), provides information on publications, links to evaluation Web sites, and meeting and conference dates. The AEA also runs several electronic lists, including EVALTALK, which is an open discussion list devoted to evaluation issues (subscribe to listserv@ua1vm.ua.edu); the Collaborative, Participatory, and Empowerment Evaluation TIG List (subscribe to majordomo@lists.stanford.edu with the message subscribe empowerment evaluation97@lists.stanford.edu); and the International and Cross-Cultural Evaluation TIG (subscribe to mailserv@palmer.edu).

The Benchmarking Exchange
http://www.benchnet.com
The Benchmarking Exchange is a comprehensive Web site designed specifically for individuals and organizations involved in benchmarking, and offers its users an online searchable library of benchmarking programs and literature, forums, and a list of contact organizations.

The Evaluation Clearinghouse
http://www3.sympatico.ca/gpic/gpichome.htm
The Evaluation Clearinghouse Web site, run by Government Performance Information Consultants, is a general interest site with thorough links to evaluation resources, a list of publications, and a helpful glossary of evaluation terms.

InnoNet Toolbox
http://www.inetwork.org
The InnoNet Toolbox Web site, developed and maintained by Innovation Network, Inc., offers tools and instruction for creating detailed evaluation plans, as well as program and fundraising plans. Also available is a database that provides downloadable generic surveys, interview guidelines, and tips for collecting data.

United Way Resource Network
http://www.unitedway.org/outcomes
This United Way site is a guide to resources available for measuring programs outcomes for health, human service, and youth and family service agencies. Excerpts from *Measuring program outcomes: A practical approach* are online, as are links to resources for agency staff and volunteers, organizations doing research in the area of youth development, and useful health and human service related evaluation resources. ◆

Jessica Chapel
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HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT
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HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE EVALUATION EXCHANGE:

Emerging Strategies in Evaluating Child and Family Services

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From the Director's Desk

Heather B. Weiss
Director, HFRP

In 15 months, we will each, in our own way, mark the beginning of a new century — indeed, a new millenium. The stock-taking and foreshadowing have already begun as conversations, public debates, and articles, and analyses focus on how far we have come and what the future might hold.

This issue of *The Evaluation Exchange* is the first of two which discuss new themes for evaluation in the 21st century. Our focus in this issue — new voices, new methods, new relationships — reminds us that ours is an ever-changing field and one which always provides new challenges as well as new opportunities.

In this issue, we have brought together a selection of articles that provide a variety of perspectives and provocative and thoughtful ideas about where evaluation is heading. Our Theory and Practice section highlights the experiences of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Evaluation Grants Program, an innovative foundation-sponsored evaluation approach that rethinks the traditional program-evaluator relationship and offers the promise of enabling us to learn better about what works and what does not. We include an article by Jim Sanders of the Evaluation Institute in our Promising Practices section. Sanders discusses the utility of cluster evaluation as a way to examine multiple programs. In our Questions and Answers section, evaluator, educator, and author Carol Weiss shares her thoughts about what the next century might mean for the field of evaluation, the training of evaluators, and the connection between evaluation and policymaking. In our Beyond Basic Training section, we highlight three innovative approaches to including stakeholders in the design and implementation of evaluations. Stan Schneider from Metis Associates writes about using students as ethnographers in a study of a family resource center; Betty Cooke of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning describes Minnesota's experiences using program staff as data collectors; and Cheryl Fish-Parcham of Families USA and Theresa Shivers of

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- **Learning from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Evaluation Grants Program 2**
- **Interview with Carol H. Weiss 5**
- **Cluster Evaluation 7**
- **Beyond Basic Training 8**
- **Following up with the Evaluation Work of Asian Neighborhood Design 11**
- **Welfare, Information, and the New Federalism 12**
- **New and Noteworthy 14**
- **Electronic Mailbox 16**

United Planning Organization/Head Start write about using client families in a study of managed health care. Our Spotlight section features an article by Tom Gais of the Rockefeller Institute of Government, which discusses the use of information technology in welfare reform. In our Evaluations to Watch section, we revisit an evaluation tool used by the Asian Neighborhood Design, which was featured in a previous issue (Vol III, No. 1), and which is now being used to examine welfare reform efforts in San Francisco. In our Electronic Mailbox and New and Noteworthy sections, we provide information on current resources, with a particular focus on toolkits to assist with evaluation.

We have also enclosed a reader survey and I encourage all of you to share your thoughts with us. Since the inception of the newsletter, we have worked to provide an interactive forum to share innovative evaluation ideas and practices. In the coming years, we hope to continue to meet this need, and we would greatly appreciate your comments about how we can best do so.

As this century draws to a close, no doubt all of us working in the field of child and family services will reflect on what we have accomplished, what we have learned, and how we move into the next century with renewed energy and enthusiasm. The discussion about where evaluation is heading is an important one, and we plan to continue contributing to the conversation. ◆

For information on submitting articles to *The Evaluation Exchange*, please call (617) 495-9108 or visit our Web site: http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~hfrp/eval

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Learning from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Evaluation Grants Program

In 1993, the Annie E. Casey Foundation launched its three-year Evaluation Grants Program. This program, which supported the evaluation activities of organizations working in the area of family support, differed from traditional foundation-funded evaluation in three fundamental ways. First, it established a partnership that involved shared power between an organization and an external evaluator. Organization staff selected the evaluator and participated actively in the evaluation. Second, the Grants Program emphasized both process and outcome studies. Third, in the evaluation process, it fostered broad participation of organization staff beyond the director level. In establishing this program, the Foundation sought to enable organization staff to learn more about their programs, to contribute to understanding in the broader field of family support, and to determine whether this new approach could be a model for future Foundation funding for evaluation.

Three organizations carried out evaluations as part of the Grants Program: the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park (Brooklyn, New York); Kaleidoscope (Chicago, Illinois); and the Center for Successful Child Development (Chicago, Illinois). While each of these organizations differed in the specific programs they provided, they were similar in their overall family support focus and their commitment to evaluation.

To learn more about the Grants Program approach, the Foundation commissioned HFRP to discuss the program with the evaluators and organization staff and to document the results. This work took place in two stages. First, HFRP conducted two telephone focus groups, one each with the evaluators and the organization staff. The purpose of these focus groups was to obtain preliminary insights and thoughts that would help to shape an agenda for a roundtable discussion of the issues. In early February 1998, organization staff, evaluators, and staff from the Foundation and HFRP met to discuss and reflect on what had worked, what had not worked, and how the approach might look different in the future. A summary of that discussion follows.

A Model for Foundation-Funded Evaluation

- ***Flexibility has been the greatest strength of the Grants Program***

Organization staff and evaluators stressed that the flexibility inherent in the Grants Program was its greatest strength. Organization staff expressed dissatisfaction with past evaluations because staff had not had an influence on the evaluation process and thus, the findings often lacked relevance for them. They appreciated that the Grants Program allowed them to select the evaluators and work closely with them to ensure that their questions about their programs were answered. Evaluators welcomed the opportunity to respond directly to the information needs of the organization staff, and in doing so, were able to innovate with new evaluation designs and instruments.

While flexibility has been vital to the success of this program, some guidance and structure can be helpful. Organizations funding this approach need to consider how much guidance and structure they should provide in managing issues of control and responsibilities between the two groups. It is important that evaluators and organization staff understand the purpose of the evaluation in the same way; this means the funding agency must clearly communicate its expectations for the evaluation.

- ***Conducting simultaneous process and outcome evaluations has advantages and disadvantages***

For organization staff, simultaneous process and outcome evaluations enabled staff to obtain both immediate feedback that is valuable to their work as well as

information on outcomes in order to respond to demands for accountability. The concern, however, is that it often takes time to demonstrate outcomes. From the evaluators' view, there is a need to spend time up front to become thoroughly familiar with the program, as well as to gain the trust of staff and build the relationships necessary to conduct a useful evaluation. These initial steps, some argue, make it more desirable to spend time focusing on the process first, and the outcomes later. However, within one organization, there may be programs conducive to a simultaneous study of process and outcomes, while for others, a greater understanding of the program may be necessary before a study of outcomes is useful.

One approach might be for sponsoring organizations to consider a two-stage approach to evaluation funding. They may wish to fund a larger set of programs for process evaluations and then choose a subset of those for funding outcome evaluations. This approach provides the added benefit of determining whether a "fit" exists between evaluator and program before moving onto a focus on outcomes.

- ***Opportunities to share ideas and experiences are important to the evaluation process***

Participants noted the value of being part of a network within which to share experiences, problem-solve, and learn about each others' practices. These discussions need to begin early in the process. They can include targeted evaluation advice from outside experts but should also provide the opportunity for evaluators to share their insights, practices, and even instruments with one another. Forums for organization staff are also important. This would provide staff the opportunity to discuss common concerns about using information to build reflective practice, developing new tools, and innovating in practice. Bringing together organization staff and evaluators on a regular basis, perhaps annually, would enable them all to engage in a much broader discussion of the evaluation process and its usefulness.

Some organizations may benefit more from this approach than others

Participants noted that there are certain organizational characteristics that might make some organizations better suited than others to an approach like that of the Grants Program. These include organizations that are willing and able to use data for decision-making; are both proud of where they are but also humble enough to undergo some scrutiny and self-reflection; are risktakers; have experience in their program interventions; and have buy-in and a desire to have research done as well as some understanding of what that means for the organization.

Conducting the Evaluation

- ***Engaging staff in the evaluation is key***

The Grants Program facilitated active engagement of organization staff in the evaluation process. Engagement occurred in different ways across the sites, but generally involved selection of the evaluator; formation of research questions; identification of needed data and data collection instruments; and interpretation of results.

- ***Relationships have to be nurtured***

While the grants approach changes the evaluator-organization relationship into a potentially more productive one, its success depends greatly on the strength of the relationship. While organization ability to select the evaluator greatly enhances the likelihood of a mutually productive relationship, the relationship needs to be nurtured continually. This requires time and energy and an ongoing negotiation of expectations and roles.

Participants noted that several steps can be taken to help foster a strong evaluator-organization relationship. Organization managers need to be sure to involve their staff members in the evaluation and provide evaluators opportunities to get to know the program and the staff. Evaluators need actively to listen to, involve, and respect staff; be adaptable and willing to try new approaches; recognize that program experience with evaluation has often been negative and work to improve this; be clear about how much work evaluation involves (Deborah Daro, evaluator of the Center for Successful Child Development noted, "ownership does not minimize the work"); and provide regular feedback to organization staff on the status of the evaluation and its preliminary findings. Both evaluators and staff need to be flexible and willing to listen and communicate. Participants also noted that relationships are strengthened when regular meetings are established and attempts are made to get to know individuals outside of their roles.

While organization ability to select the evaluator greatly enhances the likelihood of a mutually productive relationship, the relationship needs to be nurtured continually.

Participants point out that while relationships need to be built and fostered, they are in part luck, and sometimes there simply is not a workable match between the evaluator and the organization. When this occurs, it is important that both parties recognize this and move on. Likewise, the sponsor needs to have sufficient flexibility built into the process, and enough trust in the programs, to reconsider the arrangement.

- ***Both qualitative and quantitative data are necessary***

Organization staff noted that they found both the qualitative and the quantitative data provided from the evaluations to be helpful. The quantitative information has helped them to respond to demands for accountability while qualitative data have provided the in-depth information most useful for program implementation. The inclusion of information about the context in which programs operate, which was provided in one evaluation, has made the evaluation information more meaningful, particularly to external constituents.

Building Learning into Programs

- ***Evaluation can provide program operators the opportunity to reflect on their practice***

Program operators said the evaluation process contributed to an understanding of their practice and ways to improve it. Sister Mary Paul from the Center for Family Life noted, "it provides a way to articulate what is going on in a program, what is missing, and what is underdeveloped."

Participants noted that the opportunities for reflection can take many forms. For example, an evaluator might use interviews and group meetings to engage staff in a discussion of their practice, or a doctoral student may observe a program and provide feedback to staff enabling them to understand their practice better.

- ***Evaluators can help support and build the capacity for ongoing reflective practice***

Participants noted that there are several things evaluators can do to help support reflective practice among program staff: Engage staff in formulation of evaluation questions and instruments; provide feedback regularly to staff and administrators; engage staff in problem solving and examining why findings are what they are; meet with groups of staff around problem solving (without administrators); and provide training in aspects of evaluation.

- ***Sustainability of evaluation work is a real concern***

Three years after the evaluation Grants Program started, organization staff find that they still have many more questions they would like answered. The evaluations have pointed to new areas for study beyond the evaluation grants period. Peg Hess, evaluator of the Center for Family Life stated, "We're done...and yet, we're clearly not done." Additionally, the fundamental and rapid changes in the policy landscape of recent years require that programs continue to reflect and learn. To some extent, organization staff have developed new skills to help them in their own evaluative work. However, there is more to be done, and it is not clear where the resources will come from.

For sponsoring organizations, this raises important questions: How much time is enough? what level of resources are needed? how should resources be allocated? While recognizing that, in many cases, programs will not be able to fund full-scale evaluations on their own, sponsors should help develop some capacity for organizational staff to identify what they can do with available resources. Some participants suggested that sponsoring organizations may want to consider continued support for about 6-12 months after the formal evaluations are completed to ensure that some capacity is left in place. Organization staff also pointed out that sponsors may want to consider support for some administrative overhead; currently, agencies extend themselves and their staff to make evaluation work. Finally, developing linkages with universities, as was done in several of the programs, also has resulted in productive evaluation work.

> Key to reaching any audience is being creative in presenting the message.

Speaking to a Broader Audience about Family Support Programs

- ***Identifying the audiences and ways of reaching them***

Participants noted that there are a number of different potential audiences for information about this work: program staff; federal, state, and local policymakers; direct service practitioners; educators; agency staff; clients; advocates (for example, the national parent organizations); and researchers. Harriet Meyer of the Ounce of Prevention Fund pointed out that the real way to change programs is to influence the regulations, which requires that people work closely with the staff of public agencies, who, she observes, welcome evaluation information.

Participants identified several ways in which they have sought to reach different audiences: presenting at conferences; training; writing articles; and providing technical assistance. While programs have found success with these approaches, Karl Dennis of Kaleidoscope notes that it is difficult to "be a prophet in your own land."

A legitimate question when speaking about audience is whether different audiences can be addressed with the same study or set of studies. Process studies enable evaluators to give staff some sense of the kinds of things they can work with as they develop their practice. What convinces policymakers is less clear. Some note that policymakers continue to ask for randomized designs in evaluation, while others observe that policymakers are increasingly recognizing the importance of context and are asking if "it works here." Participants noted that understanding of evaluation and its use in the public arena must begin in the university — in policy/public administration and journalism programs. People in these programs often have a strong interest in children and families but little knowledge about what evaluation means and how to use the findings.

Key to reaching any audience is being creative in presenting the message. This means thinking about combining qualitative and quantitative information (for example, presenting a case study of one family with quantitative data which show how many of the program's clients share similar characteristics), presenting family histories, and using visual approaches such as photographs or a video.

- ***Speaking to the larger evaluation and research communities***

One way to view the broader benefits of funding evaluations of diverse programs is to examine their contribution to the *study* of family support. Evaluators in the Grants Program have, in some cases, found traditional approaches and instruments to be lacking and have developed new ones. For example, Michael Epstein, evaluator of Kaleidoscope, noted that evaluators and program staff involved in the Kaleidoscope evaluation developed a prototype of a strength-based scale tha' is now being used around the country.

Continued on page 15

Interview with Carol H. Weiss

Over the years, the field of evaluation has changed, in response to both growing knowledge and expertise as well as changes in programs and policies. As we move into the 21st century, the evaluation field will continue to face new challenges as well as new opportunities. We asked Carol Weiss to discuss some of her views on evaluation in the next century. A prominent evaluator, Dr. Weiss is a professor of education at Harvard University and has published 11 books, the most recent of which is *Evaluation: Methods of Studying Programs and Policies*. Although noting that "social scientists do not do a good job of predicting," Dr. Weiss did agree to share some of her thoughts and observations with us.

1) What challenges do you think face the field of evaluation in the next century?

One of our greatest challenges is that our methods are really not up to the questions that we seek to answer. We want to know not only what the outcomes of a program are but also why those outcomes appear — or fail to appear. When we deal with community-based programs, where many sets of actors collaborate, cooperate, plan, and implement activities, our methods are not adequate to understand the processes and outcomes. Community-based approaches often have multiple dimensions (health, education, job training, transportation, etc). Many of them are opportunistic, in the sense that they address whatever community problems become susceptible to intervention as circumstances allow. The programs employ a range of strategies and reach a shifting array of recipients. Under these conditions, evaluation doesn't have the appropriate tools and techniques to understand fully what is going on.

Theory-based evaluation is one approach that has a great deal of promise. But trying to use theory-based evaluation is difficult when programs do not have any explicit — or even implicit — theories, when programs are amorphous, or when they shift significantly over time. Foundations and governments will exert pressure on evaluators to develop new ways of evaluating these complex multisector programs, and the need to answer harder questions will force us to develop new approaches.

One of the issues that persistently arises in a discussion of evaluation methods is the utility of experimental design. Some people have been much too ready to reject random-assignment designs. I recognize that in many cases experimental design is not workable. But comparison groups are often feasible, and some comparison is usually better than none at all.

Concepts from experimental design, such as "threats to validity," need to be taken seriously. Mosteller and Tukey identified four factors that are necessary to establish a causal link. First, there has to be responsiveness of the outcome; in other words, the outcome has to follow the intervention. Second, you have to eliminate plausible alternatives that could explain the results. Third, you need to identify the mechanisms that lead to the results. Finally, you have to replicate the results. Note that the authors do not discuss random-assignment design as the only way to establish that the program was the cause of the observed results. They lay out the logical requirements for establishing causality. That last step, replication, is important. One evaluation is not going to settle an issue. Rather, we need to have multiple evaluations of the same kind of program using different techniques. If the different evaluations converge on the same results, we have pretty strong evidence that we know how successful that kind of programming is. I think that this is one way that evaluation should go. We can do this with qualitative and quantitative work; we can do it with small programs and large programs. But it takes a lot of evaluation capacity.

Another direction in which evaluation is moving is toward greater appreciation of the need to understand a program and how it works. Evaluators are used to switching from one field to another — evaluating a pre-school program one day and a delinquency prevention the next and a nutrition program the third. They rely on their methods. But to do a first-class job, they need to become savvy about the mechanisms of change in the different fields. Such knowledge can come from specializing in a single field long enough to gain profound knowledge of the ways in which interventions produce effects and the conditions under which efforts are most likely to appear. If evaluators move from field to field, they need to be sure that they gain as much knowledge as possible, either from other team members, consultants, reading, or program practitioners. Evaluators cannot rely solely on their expertise in research methodology any longer. They have to understand the program field.

The other missing piece is on the program side. Practitioners need to be much more aware of theory and research. Programs need to be planned more systematically, with close attention to evidence, rather than solely on the basis of unexamined intuition. I don't mean to downplay the wisdom of practice. Practitioners learn a great deal from experience, and experienced practitioners are wonderfully knowledgeable. But they have to examine their knowledge, their assumptions, and their beliefs about why a program should be done in a certain way and how it is going to attain the results they want. They need to look at research evidence as well as the experiences of other programs. There is probably more of a tradition of rational planning in public health programs than in areas such as education, criminal justice, or social work. These fields need to catch up. We have lost a lot of knowledge about effective programming because practitioners and program planners have not systematically examined their experience and the evidence or brought the knowledge to bear on the development of new programs.

2) *What do you think this implies for how evaluators and others are educated/ trained?*

Very few places offer comprehensive training for evaluators. Most university departments offer one or two courses in evaluation to go along with the courses in research methods and statistics. If that is the case, there should be more opportunity for supervised apprenticeship activities. I think that apprenticeship is the best way to learn. Most of us got some education and then went out into the working world. If we were lucky enough to work with good people in our early jobs, we learned a lot.

Practitioners also need a basic understanding of evaluation — what I might call "evaluation appreciation." They need to understand what evaluation is all about, what it takes to do a good study, how to recognize a good study when they see it, what they should look for, and what to do with evaluation results.

As this implies, we need to train more than evaluators. Colleges and universities should train people who will be requesting evaluations, contracting for evaluations, reviewing evaluations, and applying the results of the work to organizational problems. The use of evaluation results is an obviously important issue. We can demand a lot of evaluators when it comes to supplying useful evaluation reports, but there have to be informed and willing "users" on the other end. Evaluators, of course, have a significant responsibility. They have to address the right issues, they have to provide a quality study, they have to communicate it well, and they have to communicate it to multiple audiences. But there has to be receptivity on the receiving side. Those in program and policy positions have to want to know what evaluation can tell them and how it can help them do a better job and make policy and practice more effective. And they have to have the will to do it.

Influencing and educating the media and policymakers are other challenges. In my research, I have found that the way federal policymakers tend to hear about research is not through journals or books but through the *New York Times* or *Newsweek*. That means that research has to be news. Reporters have to find it newsworthy for one of several reasons: it is on a topic that attracts many readers, it contradicts taken-for-granted assumptions, it is counterintuitive, or it has human interest. Evaluators need to learn how to present their findings in ways that meet journalistic criteria. These days policymakers tend to be well-educated, and many have familiarity with the social sciences. I think they have greater understanding of evaluation than previous generations. But they, like journalists, need to have the evidence convincingly communicated to them. We also have to pay more attention to ways of making evaluation results visible, beyond the words on the page. With all the marvels of computers and the World Wide Web, we ought to be able to think of ways to get the evaluation messages out.

To have a sustained influence, evaluations have to be well-designed and conducted. And there has to be an accumulation of evidence.

3) *What do you think this implies for how evaluation can better contribute to policymaking?*

First, we need to be very good evaluators. Evaluators should not undertake a study if the conditions for good evaluation are not there. Evaluation takes time, resources, and skill. Evaluators should not take on studies when they know they cannot do a good job. I recognize that this is easy for me to say sitting here in a university. But evaluators do not have to be passive in accepting whatever conditions the sponsor sets. They can argue back, explain that the time is too short, the requisite data are unavailable, appropriate comparisons are missing, the money is insufficient for the size of the task, or whatever the problems may be. It is not easy to do. Evaluators want the contract. But I believe that many sponsors, including government sponsors, would sometimes (although not always) be willing to listen to good arguments that what they are asking for is not going to lead to a credible study. They may be willing to change the request if they realize that the kind of study they are asking for is going to yield unpersuasive evidence and will easily be discredited by anyone who dislikes the way the results come out. This is not to say that most evaluators do not do a good job. Most of them do, and many of them do a very good job. But the field is tarnished by the clunkers.

A big issue is improving the influence of evaluation on policy. To have a sustained influence, evaluations have to be well-designed and conducted. And there has to be an accumulation of evidence. We shouldn't think of evaluation as a set of one-shot studies. We should think of it as a continuing effort. In some areas, such as job training, there has been a conscientious accumulation of evidence since the 1960s. Authors have collected and summarized results critically, and they have drawn conclusions about the kinds of programming that work well. In some areas we have not done these kinds of critical reviews to help inform practice and policy. Evaluators should view themselves as part of an ongoing enterprise to develop knowledge for action.

Several things can be done to develop this stock of knowledge. Meta-analysis has been extremely useful in getting together the quantitative evidence and examining effect sizes, and we need to do more of that. We might take this a step further and set up groups that systematically look at all the evidence that has accumulated about mechanisms of change in particular practice fields and the environmental conditions that are conducive to success. Lee Cronbach once suggested the formation of Social Problem Study Committees to take an ongoing look at such social issues as teen pregnancy or school dropouts. Such groups would study all the evidence that becomes available on their topic and periodically summarize what they have learned and what still needs to be known. If the people in these groups were well respected and had access to policymakers and the media, their words might carry considerable weight. Such work would help us address our greatest concerns as society moves into the next century. ◆

Karen Horsch
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Cluster Evaluation

Cluster evaluation is an approach to program evaluation that was developed at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation during the late 1980s to address certain outcome questions. The need for a different way of doing program evaluation arose when multiple grants (sites) were awarded to address common problems, and grantees were allowed to operationalize the problems independently, develop strategies to address the problems they defined, and develop their own project evaluation plan. The types of general problems that were being addressed included improving science literacy of children and adults in Michigan, improving agricultural safety, improving health practices of adults in rural communities, increasing public policy participation of rural citizens, and improving public knowledge about environmental issues connected to ground water in Michigan.

Typically, the sites would modify their proposed project designs during the first year of their three-year grant and then continue to change them as they learned from their successes and failures. Each project adapted to its local environment. Its human resources, existing and past programs, priorities (including institutional commitment), and physical resources all shaped the ways in which they tried to achieve their defined outcomes.

The board of the Foundation rightfully wanted to know, given a sizeable investment, whether any progress had been made in the general problem area and, if so, what was it? In each case the question was, "What happened and why?"

The individual project evaluations were insufficient to answer this question holistically. Because of the intentional lack of standardization and control, aggregation of findings was not feasible. There was a sizeable collection of case studies (each cluster had anywhere between 5 and 50 funded sites), but if one wanted to draw conclusions from the total collective experience, he/she would have been hard-pressed to come up with a cost-effective way to do so.

Cluster evaluation was created to address the following questions:

1) Overall, have changes occurred in the desired direction? What is the nature of these changes?

2) In what contexts have different types of changes occurred and why?

3) Are there insights to be drawn from failures and successes that can inform future initiatives?

4) What is needed to sustain changes that are worth continuing?

The basic element needed to make cluster evaluation work is *collaboration* — working together across all sites as a team of evaluators with a common goal and learning from everyone's collective experiences to get answers to these questions. The key component of cluster evaluation has been *networking conferences*, during which information is shared and analyzed by all of the grantees. They learn together as if they were in a course together in which cooperative learning was the instructional model. This takes planning.

The key component of cluster evaluation has been networking conferences, during which information is shared and analyzed by all of the grantees.

The steps in cluster evaluation are as follows:

1) Grants are made based on proposals for projects addressing a general problem. Each proposal includes a project-level evaluation plan.

2) A cluster evaluator is hired by the funder.

3) The cluster evaluator visits each site, collects documents, becomes oriented to the local project and local evaluation plan, makes suggestions, and negotiates roles — a partnership involving the funder; the grantee and its staff, including evaluation staff; and the cluster evaluator.

4) The first networking conference is dedicated to a search for commonalities and uniquenesses in outcome objectives across projects, and to the development of categories of strategies being planned to achieve different outcomes. In general, it serves to develop a common understanding of mission and conceptual clarity.

5) Networking conferences held at six-month intervals continue to refine operational definitions, develop common instruments, and share findings. Cluster-level questions and data collection plans evolve as data collection and analysis plans, and plans for reporting findings at future networking conferences develop. Outside consultants are invited to stimulate new ways of thinking about the general problem or about evaluation methods. Later conferences focus on discussions of findings and examine why they occurred. They also include a debate of tentative evaluative conclusions, with a look at missing documentation, which alllows for outside interpretations of tentative evaluative conclusions.

Cluster evaluation is intrusive and affects the thinking and practices of all who are involved — project staff, funders, and evaluators. In the end, it supports or rejects claims that were made at the beginning in the form of intended

outcomes. It accumulates a wealth of explanatory information from diverse settings. It involves many minds, leading to considerable certainty about the collective evaluative conclusions that are reached.

Important elements of cluster evaluation are:

- Clear role definitions and understandings
- Cooperation
- Conflict resolution among the partners
- Trust
- Giving credit when it is due.

There are both strengths and limitations to the cluster evaluation approach. On the positive side, cluster evaluation is an evolutionary approach to program evaluation; is participatory and collaborative; helps build capacity; produces information and understandings beyond those found in individual project evaluations; is outcome driven; pushes for clarity; and involves multiple perspectives. Its limitations come from the opportunities for bias and co-optation to occur. Cluster evaluation is also time-bound and depends on goodwill, cooperation, coordination, and stability of cluster membership. All partners should share the vision of the collective effort to bring about change and need to take their responsibilities to the cluster seriously.

If done well, a cluster evaluation can be exciting and productive, producing new understanding and clear results. It is a practice worth trying. ◆

James Sanders
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Parts of this article are based on Sanders, J. R. (1997). Cluster Evaluation. In Eleanor Chelimsky & William R. Shadish (Eds.) Evaluation for the 21st Century. *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.*

BEYOND BASIC TRAINING

Increasingly, evaluators are engaging key stakeholders in the design and implementation of evaluations. The following three articles discuss experiences working with different sets of stakeholders: program staff, youth, and client families. The authors offer insights into training and support as well as some of the lessons learned in using this type of participatory approach to evaluation.

Use of Staff in Family Program Evaluations

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a voluntary public school program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth and kindergarten. The mission of ECFE is to strengthen families through the education and support of all parents in providing the best possible environment for the healthy growth and development of their children. During the 1996-97 school year more than 280,000 young children and their parents participated. Funded by more than $35 million in state and local funds, ECFE is the nation's largest and oldest program of its kind.

> Over the years, evaluation has become integrated into ECFE practice and is viewed by most staff as a strategic learning opportunity.

Evaluation of ECFE has been a priority since the first pilot programs began in 1975. In the early years, evaluation was essential to document local acceptance of the program, help shape program development, and inform policymakers of ECFE progress. Over the years, evaluation has become integrated into ECFE practice and is viewed by most staff as a strategic learning opportunity. Both the process and products of evaluations are used to understand families and shape program effectiveness. Today many ECFE professionals are sophisticated evaluation users.

ECFE has developed and adopted a set of evaluation principles which underscore that ECFE evaluations are collaborative ventures and should be an integrated component of programs. The principles emphasize staff involvement in evaluation and use of information to enhance program effectiveness. They set clear parameters for making evaluation design decisions and allow staff to work as partners with evaluation consultants in all phases of an evaluation.

The most recent study (Mueller, 1996) included use of outside evaluation experts working collaboratively with state and local ECFE staff in determining the evaluation purpose and design. Twenty-eight ECFE staff members from the 14 school district ECFE programs involved served as data collectors. All site evaluators were trained in interviewing, observation, videotaping, and analysis. Site evaluators also participated in the pilot phase of the evaluation and helped revise data collection strategies. Support available to these evaluators included detailed evaluation guides prepared for each round of data collection, access to evaluation consultants for technical assistance, and evaluation workshops held four times during the evaluation. Training and technical assistance for staff involved in this study were provided by the outside evaluator and the state level program coordinator.

In addition to data collection and analysis, site evaluators maintained detailed technical notes on their work. Evaluators also responded to several surveys designed to monitor their reactions to the process and document preliminary conclusions about families and recommendations for program change. Site evaluators or their districts received a nominal honorarium.

Staff described several benefits of the study experience, including personal change, in-depth understanding of the families they serve, ideas for program change, better understanding of the eval-

uation process and information, and the superior advantage staff have over outsiders in engaging families in the evaluation. Challenges noted by the staff involved the complexity and demands of the evaluation, including the amount of time, energy, and organization required. Staff members found it difficult to complete evaluation duties while fulfilling their regular work with families.

Key lessons include:

- Involving outside evaluation consultants who understand and value the importance of collaboration between evaluators and state and local evaluation users is essential.

- Having a project manager — in this case a state-level program coordinator — working in partnership with evaluation consultants to communicate and monitor details of the evaluation, and act as a liaison among all involved provides a necessary link.

- Planning training and technical assistance carefully (i.e., providing evaluation guides for each study phase, workshops when needed, and easy access to evaluation consultants) enhances the development of staff evaluation skills.

- Approaching evaluation as a learning opportunity facilitates capacity building in organizations.

Discussion about new evaluation issues began before the study was completed. A new evaluation agenda is being implemented that responds to the recommendations of the most recent study and continues the tradition of the participatory approach to evaluation in ECFE. ◆

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High Stakes Stakeholders: Involving Youth in the Collection and Analysis of Evaluation Data

In 1988, the Georgia legislature created the Youth Futures Authority (YFA) to "develop a comprehensive plan for public and private organizations to deal with youth problems, help implement the plan, and contract with the appropriate agencies to provide direct services under that plan." The YFA established the St. Pius X Family Resource Center (FRC) in 1994 to serve as a community-based center offering various social services and community activities that benefit area residents.

Metis Associates recently completed an evaluation of the FRC. We used a participatory approach in which local stakeholders were asked to play significant roles in designing and executing the evaluation, and in analyzing and utilizing the results. Consistent with this, and with the FRC's dual interests in youth development and community service, fifteen neighborhood youth (middle school and high school students) were recruited, hired and trained to help design, administer, and analyze a youth survey about community conditions and needs. The survey also determined whether the FRC's programs and activities corresponded to the interests and needs of neighborhood youth.

Our goals in involving youth were to:

- Incorporate youth into the evaluation in a meaningful way

- Ensure that the youth survey reflected the ideas, concerns, and colloquial language of young people

- Provide participating youth with experiences that enhance critical-thinking and research skills

- Introduce career pathways related to research

- Reinforce an emerging sense of *communitas*, or community spirit, that is reflected in the FRC's approach

- Develop a cadre of neighborhood youth to support ongoing and future local evaluation efforts.

Our approach included training and support for the "youth survey consultants" in reviewing and summarizing the survey findings, preparing tables and graphs, writing about findings, and preparing oral reports to groups such as the YFA. Through a series of workshops, we provided training for these youngsters to make presentations to homeroom classes in their schools, and to distribute, collect, and tally surveys. Metis staff worked with youth survey researchers to identify strategies they could use to obtain commitments and support from school administrators and staff for the survey effort. We wanted youth to explain the purpose of the survey to their schoolmates, describe their own involvement in its development, and identify strategies they could use to encourage high participation rates. This, we believed, would enable youth to learn about and overcome typical administrative challenges as well as improve on the quantity and thoughtfulness of their peers' responses.

The youth survey researchers were able to obtain almost 800 responses from students, and many were able to obtain a response rate of 100 percent. Metis arranged for data entry and analysis of the survey. We met with the youth researchers to review and interpret the findings, and to help them write up selected findings. One student's article made the front page of *The Savannah Herald*. Two of the participating youth presented their findings at the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual conference on research and evaluation. The survey uncovered a number of significant issues that are currently being addressed by the FRC.

Metis negotiated contracts with the youth participants specifying the activities in which they would provide assistance, and the terms of their employment. Stipends were provided based on the response rate for each class that was surveyed. To recognize and celebrate the students' accomplishment, Metis hosted a reception for the youth survey researchers and their families. At the reception, we presented the youth with Certificates of Achievement and letters of reference that they could use to help secure part-time or summer jobs.

We believe that the use of youth as evaluators and data collectors deepened

the participatory evaluation approach by incorporating them into the assessment in a respectful and useful way. This methodology strengthened the FRC's understanding of and commitment to youth, and strengthened youths' connection with and commitment to their community. It also provided a means for Center staff to learn more about the interests and concerns of young people, and in turn, to develop a focused response that incorporated youths' perspectives into planning. Involving local youth in this type of evaluation supports them in developing skills needed to clearly define their interests, create plans or programs that enable them to meet their objectives, and advocate on their own behalf. The participatory evaluation process also left youth participants with enhanced interpersonal communication capabilities developed through training and use of interviewing skills that are transferable to other situations. Such a process helped increase their understanding of the importance of research, needs assessment and evaluation, and introduced possible career pathways. By providing youth with opportunities to participate directly in the assessment of their own community, we believe that one can strengthen the unity between learning and social life, and can promote the transfer of knowledge and social wealth from one generation to the next. ◆

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For further information, please contact Gaye Smith, Interim Executive Director, Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority, 316 East Bay Street, Savannah, GA 31412. Tel: (912) 651-6810. Metis Associates has developed a package of sample materials that can be readily adapted for use in a youth assessment activity. To obtain these, contact Berle Driscoll, Senior Associate, Metis Associates, Inc., 80 Broad Street, Suite 1600, New York, NY. 10004 Tel: (212) 425-8833.

Consumers Survey Each Other about Medicaid Managed Care

In 1997, Families USA and the United Planning Organization's Head Start program in the District of Columbia began a project to involve parents in monitoring Medicaid managed care. A team of twelve Head Start parents surveyed 120 households regarding their Medicaid managed care experiences. The team reported their findings to District officials and health plans, successfully advocating for managed care improvements.

Parents described their own problems in managed care in early team meetings. Families USA used the team's suggestions and questions from other standardized surveys to develop a survey instrument. The resulting instrument included multiple choice and open-ended questions. After role playing and a pilot test, team members each received a list of randomly selected Head Start parents to survey face-to-face.

The project's effect on team members is as important as its results for managed care.

We learned several lessons about how to get maximum participation and improve the accuracy of survey results when using peer interviewers:

- We needed to establish interviewers' legitimacy to respondents. We did this by providing letters of introduction signed by Head Start staff and by scheduling the face-to-face interviews at Head Start centers.

- Face-to-face surveys were effective but telephone surveys were not. Troubled by the time it was taking to schedule face-to-face appointments, we allowed parents to try a few interviews by phone. This did not work — respondents thought the interview might be a telephone solicitation or were otherwise suspicious; and many people in our randomly selected sample did not have working phones.

- Staff follow-up on surveys was essential. We thought going into this project that peers would be especially effective in eliciting health experiences from respondents. In fact, peers were good initial screeners for managed care problems, but respondents sometimes told peer surveyors that their health problems were personal and asked that staff instead call them to learn about the details of a problem. We did this.

- Ongoing meetings and education of the survey team helped the project succeed. The survey team needed to understand how managed care was supposed to work in order to probe for problems in the open-ended section of the interview. We discussed Medicaid beneficiaries' rights and case experiences in our monthly meetings and we developed a brochure, "Know Your Rights," which addressed some frequently reported problems. Surveyors gave this brochure to respondents *after* they had completed a survey.

To keep the team together, the project paid members stipends to attend meetings and complete surveys; encouraged parents to speak at community functions; and convened monthly meetings. At these meetings, parents shared survey experiences with each other, and health officials provided updated information about managed care.

Overall, we found the peer survey an effective method of gathering information and of involving Medicaid consumers in advocacy. The survey team testified in city council hearings about their findings and met with the District's Medicaid officials. As a result, parents have seen changes in Medicaid managed care this year. The District has invested in enrollment education. Plans have revised their member handbooks to explain how to get mental health services and how to file complaints. The survey team has established an ongoing relationship with local officials. The team refers individual and systemic problems to the Medicaid agency and meets with officials to ensure a response.

The project's effect on team members is as important as its results for managed care. Participating parents have become

Continued on page 15

Following up with the Evaluation Work of Asian Neighborhood Design

In a previous issue of this newsletter (Vol. III, No. 1, 1997), we featured a practice-based anti-poverty strategy developed by the Asian Neighborhood Design (A.N.D.) in San Francisco. The foundation of this strategy is an evaluation instrument that enables the development of a self-sufficiency plan for individual clients. Over the past few years, A.N.D. has used this instrument in its own work and has shared it with many others. In this issue, we follow its progress.

Traditional categorical approaches to addressing the needs of low-income populations often fail to account for the fact that the struggle out of poverty is more of a dynamic process than a static problem. To attack poverty, one needs to go beyond traditional notions of income level that have defined those in and out of poverty. A.N.D. has begun from the premise that stable self-sufficiency must be the goal of an anti-poverty strategy: Those who are self-sufficient exhibit a number of qualities, including the ability to make choices based on plans for the future rather than immediate survival. Thus, anti-poverty work cannot be generic or categorical; rather, it is very personal and individualized.

A.N.D. has developed and implemented an anti-poverty strategy which focuses on individual strengths and weaknesses as a means to address the challenge of self-sufficiency. The foundation of this approach has been an evaluation instrument in which the client and the case worker work together to develop a "self-sufficiency plan" for the client. The self-sufficiency plan is based on an assessment of seven personal and environmental indicators: income/assets; education/skills; housing/food; safety/environment; human services; relationships; and personal attributes. Underlying this approach is the belief that each person's life is a combination of strengths (assets) and weaknesses (barriers) in these areas, and it is the accumulation of a critical mass of strengths which is the distinguishing feature of those who are considered self-sufficient.

Through a self-assessment and interviews, a profile of the client, including his or her assets and barriers, is developed and a baseline established. The methodology allows the client and the case worker to discuss the various interrelated issues that must be addressed in order for the client to achieve self-sufficiency. The baseline assessment becomes the starting point for the case worker and the client to develop a personal self-sufficiency plan for the participant which delineates what needs to be done to help the client to reach stable self-sufficiency. This is accomplished primarily through utilization of mainstream support systems or through special assistance based on the client's knowledge or initiative. Progress in achieving self-sufficiency is recorded at regular intervals.

A.N.D. has received many requests for the tools we use from all over the country, including public agencies and non-profits. Most recently, the Department of Social Services for the County of San Francisco has decided to adopt this approach for its Welfare to Work program. The agency selected this instrument because it wanted a comprehensive assessment in which changes in people's lives could be mapped over time. A.N.D. is adapting the tool to the population served by this agency and assists in the training of up to 150 staff members. The agency is interested in making sure that the instrument is comprehensive, can be administered quickly (it will be used to work with approximately 9,000 people) and is set up to lead to concrete action plans. Adjustments have had to be made to accommodate department staffing and welfare regulations. For example, for TANF recipients (mostly women or families with children), the instrument has been revised to gather more information on family, children, etc., as indicators of problems or assets. For those receiving general assistance — mostly single males — the instrument includes fewer questions related to family and more related to homelessness, peers, etc. For immigrants, we are including questions that look at issues of language and culture.

The County will use the tool not only for TANF recipients but also for its General Assistance population. In addition, the San Francisco Housing Authority will use the tools for the residents in their housing, many of whom are on welfare.

We continue to stress that this tool is only a way of categorizing information. What is most important is the approach and the ways decisions are made. The tool should be seen as a way to build a trusting relationship. Unlike many instruments that are administered, our tools in themselves will not lead to good appraisal. Instead, they require a person who can use the assessment as a base for taking action. Common sense decision-making by the assessor is essential, as are discussions with the participants and a cross check of the assessment over time with other indicators. ◆

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For further information on this evaluation approach, please contact: Asian Neighborhood Design, 461 Bush Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, CA 94108. Tel: (415) 982-2959.

Please complete *The Evaluation Exchange* Reader Survey, included as an insert in this issue.

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Welfare, Information, and the New Federalism

The Personal Responsibility Act of 1996 may be the first large-scale "information age" social policy in the United States. Informational linkages lie at the heart of the new devolution. Rather than relying on procedural rules and regulations to control the administration of state and local programs, information systems offer the promise that state and local agencies can experiment with different policies, procedures, staffing, and agency assignments — including privatization — while still remaining accountable to central authorities by reporting accurate and interpretable information on program objectives and expenditures.

That promise may be fulfilled some day, but the time has not arrived yet. Data are the only possible major weakness in the implementation of the new welfare. The new federal, state, and local welfare reforms demand a *multiplicity* of new or greatly expanded functions for state information systems, and governments, even during these relatively flush times, do not have the resources to create systems in the short run that perform all of these functions. A critical political struggle has developed over which of these functions will take priority, a conflict whose resolution could shape welfare programs for many years.

> The new federal, state, and local welfare reforms demand a multiplicity of new or greatly expanded functions for state information systems...

Most of the attention to information systems has focused on generating the new quarterly reports states are required to submit to the federal government. These are controversial since the federal government can impose financial penalties on states that fail to submit timely reports and because they call for data that greatly exceed the information traditionally reported by state welfare systems. Most of these systems were designed to generate routine information on the number of families served as well as selected characteristics of those families. But the new reports call for information on work participation rates, hours worked, types of work activities engaged in, and reasons why people leave the welfare rolls — information that few state systems ever bothered to collect, much less report.

An even greater challenge for the states is the pending federal proposal to require states to report extensive information on the programs that states treat as "maintenance of effort" (MOE) spending. Federal agencies are concerned that some states may divert hard-to-employ adults away from federally-supported TANF programs — which are subject to minimum work participation rates — and into separate, state-funded programs not covered by such rates. To be sure that states are not inflating their TANF work rates in this way, the federal government proposed a rule that requires reporting for MOE programs on people who would otherwise be eligible for TANF. This rule makes sense from a federal perspective, but many states argue that the proposal adds new and difficult reporting burdens and that it works to constrain MOE services to TANF eligibles rather than encouraging support for post-TANF services.

Federal accountability is certainly a legitimate function. The Congress and the federal executive — and the nation's citizens — ought to know how federal funds are spent. They should be able to tell whether TANF money is spent on the purposes identified in the Personal Responsibility Act, or whether states are instead using the block grant to reduce their own share of welfare spending. Federal authorities also should determine whether indicators of good performance are attributable to good programs, or whether those indicators are an artifact of a strategic shuffling of client families.

But it is also true that federal accountability is only one of the many functions that information systems need to perform. Before you can account for a program, it seems reasonable that the program ought to operational — yet in research conducted by the Rockefeller Institute of Government, we are finding that there is an enormous and pressing need for information systems that would give workers and managers the ability to implement the new welfare programs fully.

The State Capacity Study of the Rockefeller Institute is examining the management systems that states have created (or, more accurately, are creating) to carry out their new welfare programs. As of mid-May, 18 out of 21 state research teams in the study had submitted reports and we can tentatively draw several conclusions from their analyses:

1) Although many states have devolved authority and responsibility for the design and operation of welfare programs down to local offices — whether they be local governments, local offices of state agencies, or private contractors — they are still using centralized information systems that are designed to support statewide information collection and analysis, not local management and operational needs. Local managers and workers often have no direct access to the state's welfare information system. They provide data which are entered into mainframe systems but it may be weeks or even months before they receive information about their own caseload, work participation rates, and other summary measures. Local managers cannot use this old information to respond quickly to rapidly changing problems. Nor can they use the information to pinpoint the sources of problems, since the reports are often summaries that do not let managers see whether the problems are occurring at certain points in the administrative

process, at certain times of the week, or for certain types of clients or families. The data reports thus offer little information managers can use to improve their own work processes.

2) Most states are bringing several functions together in their administrative systems to achieve the ambitious goals of welfare reform, such as child support, child care, employment programs, job readiness training, as well as the traditional cash assistance program. In some states, front-line welfare workers are given broad case management responsibilities and have such titles as "family independence specialists." Although positions and offices are officially integrated, their information systems are not. Each function typically has its own information system, and workers with new holistic titles and responsibilities may have to deal with three or more different systems — for example, one for child support, one or more for determining and tracking eligibility for assistance, and at least one for job placement and activities.

3) There is a lot confusion about what current information systems can and cannot do, especially among state and local officials. Our researchers asked both state and local administrators whether their information systems could answer a wide range of questions that we thought managers would want to know. We sometimes found very little agreement between state and local officials about what questions could and could not be answered by current systems. In particular, state officials saw these systems as much more capable and informative than did local managers and workers.

4) Substantively, the current information systems are generally fine at determining program and maintaining information on program eligibility, though keeping track of multiple time limits is more of a challenge. They are much less adept at giving front-line workers a view of the "history" of each family as it goes through the increasingly complicated *process* of welfare, which may include immediate job search, orientation meetings, job readiness training, assessments of employability, waits for child care, individual responsibility agreements, job placement, job loss, recertifications, partial sanctions, and loops back through one or more of these stages. Thus, the systems are not really designed to help case managers keep track of the families assigned to them.

5) State information systems are not readily changed to fit new policies and administrative structures, nor do they easily accommodate variation across localities. They are not very adaptable to local differences in programs and attempts to try out innovations in program design, performance measures, or ways of connecting with other related systems. Part of the problem seems to be the tendency for states to make system changes in one of two ways: by making small changes in large existing systems and patching together previously unconnected systems (which don't change the fact that the basic systems are mostly unsuited to the new policies); and, to a lesser degree, by making comprehensive state-wide redesigns. Both of these approaches are reasonable, but they also generate a tension between information systems (which either change very little or in occasional great leaps) and policies or management needs (which change more frequently and may vary across localities). This tension may be inevitable. However, a modular system might alleviate the problem by creating an integrated platform that permits the development, modification, and replacement of specific functionalities.

6) The training of workers who are supposed to use the new systems is generally inadequate. States usually offer short sessions with little follow-up, and day-to-day assistance is typically not available locally. This is hardly a unique or surprising point. Many states are still developing new systems, and weak instruction of end-users is a common problem in the private as well as the public sector.

7) The information reported by local service providers and administrative offices is still fairly "thin." That is, accountability *within* states is often not very well developed, though many states are trying to address this problem. There is still little consensus about what constitutes success in welfare programs and how to measure it, though work participation rates and caseload reduction tend to dominate the current measures. Even in more "advanced" states with significant experience under the waiver programs, there is very little information on what treatments people receive and why, which can make it difficult to protect against creaming, inequities, and under-service by providers.

These preliminary observations are not criticisms of states, federal requirements, or even welfare reform. State and federal welfare reforms call for major changes in informational capacities, and it is still early in the process of implementation. Instead, we present these findings because we want the full scope of the informational challenge to be recognized — which includes local management needs as well as the demands of federal accountability. When these challenges are understood, it becomes clear to us that, given the current resources available for welfare information systems, there is a need to find a balance among short-term priorities. This need has become even more acute as states' technological expertise is strained by the effort to solve the "Year-2000" problem. Determining this balance demands a wide-ranging discussion of "Informational Federalism," the proper roles of federal, state, and local governments in creating, managing, and using information — a discussion which the Rockefeller Institute hopes to inform in its future reports. ◆

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Additional information on these and related management issues will be highlighted in forthcoming Rockefeller Reports. *Readers of this article may be particularly interested in Dr. Terrence Maxwell's forthcoming report on "Informational Federalism." To be placed on the mailing list, please contact the Federalism Research Group. Tel: (518) 443-5844 or by e-mail at "fedgroup@rockinst.org". Our reports are also available at the Institute's Web site: http://rockinst.org*

We regret that we cannot provide copies of the materials listed below. Please contact the publisher or authoring organization directly.

Bloom, Martin, Fischer, Joel, & Orme, John G. (1995). ***Evaluating practice: Guidelines for the accountable professional.*** **Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.** This book makes available to students and practitioners in the fields of human services, social work, education, and other helping professions, the knowledge, skills, and specific procedures to evaluate their own practices. ***Tel: (800) 666-9433. Allyn & Bacon, P.O. Box 10695, Des Moines, IA 50336-0695. E-mail: simon@neodata.com***

Burt, Martha R., Harrell, Adele V., Newmark, Lisa C., Aron, Laudan Y., & Jacobs, Lisa K. (1997). ***Evaluation guidebook: Projects funded by S.T.O.P. formula grants under the Violence Against Women Act.*** **Washington, DC: Urban Institute.** This guidebook is intended to be a resource for all evaluators, policymakers, and others interested in learning about the success of programs aimed at aiding women victims of violence. The guidebook has a broader application though, with chapters covering the evaluation process, choosing an evaluation design, and the use of evaluation information. ***Web: http://www.urban.org/crime/evalguide.html***

Evaluation: The International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice. This is an international, interdisciplinary journal published quarterly by Sage Publications, offering articles from the social sciences and other fields on original evaluation research, reviews of relevant literature, and overviews of developments in evaluation policy and practice. ***Fax: (805) 499-0871. Sage Publications, Inc., 2455 Teller Road, Newbury Park, CA 91320.***

Evaluation and Program Planning. The emphasis of this journal is on assisting evaluators and planners with improving their practice, developing their skills, and improving their knowledge base. Articles on the techniques and methods of evaluation and planning are presented from contributors in both the private and public sectors. ***Tel: (212) 633-3730. Fax: (212) 633-3680. Customer Support Department, PO Box 945, New York, NY 10159-0945. Web: http://www.elsevier.com/publications/store/5/9/3/index.htt***

Evaluation Review: A Journal of Applied Social Research. This journal, published six times a year by Sage Publications, is a forum for researchers, planners, and policymakers engaged in the development, implementation, and utilization of evaluation studies in the fields of health and human services, social work, education, criminal justice, public administration, and mental health. The journal features articles on methodological developments, commentaries, and occasional pieces on innovative applications of specific evaluation research techniques, concepts, and ideas. ***Fax: (805) 499-0871. Sage Publications, Inc., 2455 Teller Road, Newbury Park, CA 91320.***

Journal of Policy Analysis and Management. This journal examines the issues and practices in policy analysis and public management. Contributors include public managers, researchers, and economists. Articles include program evaluations, book reviews, and a department devoted to the discussion of the ideas and issues of importance to practitioners, researchers, and academics. ***Tel: (212) 850-6645. Fax: (212) 850-6021. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Subscription Department, 605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158-0012.***

Ottawa-Carleton Health Department. (1997). ***The program evaluation tool kit: A blueprint for public health management.*** **Ottawa: Author.** This tool kit offers a step-by-step guide to evaluating programs. Through a series of modules with simple explanations, specific tools, and accompanying worksheets, the kit brings the evaluation process down to five easy steps. Although the examples used are primarily from public health programs, the process outlined can be applied to the evaluation of any program. ***Tel: (613) 724-4122, ext. 3752.***

Rossman, Gretchen B. & Rallis, Sharon F. (1998). ***Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research.*** **Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.** Written for beginning evaluation students, this book offers an introduction to qualitative research methods. Chapters focus on the fundamentals of research, and also examine the personal qualities needed to be a good researcher. ***Tel: (805) 499-0721. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320. E-mail: info@sagepub.com Web: http://www.sagepub.com***

Walsh, Joan. (1998). ***The eye of the storm: Ten years on the front lines of new futures.*** **Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.** This report features interviews with Don Crary of New Futures for Youth in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Otis S. Johnson of the Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority in Georgia, who candidly discuss their involvement in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's "New Futures" initiative, and what they have learned in creating systems reform in their communities. ***Tel: (410) 547-6600. Fax: (410)547-6624. 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202.***

Weiss, Carol H. (1997). ***Evaluation: Methods for studying programs and policies.*** **Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.** This book provides an overview of the participants and stakeholders, methods, and data use of evaluations. Chapters explain evaluation, the purposes of evaluation, the planning and design of evaluations, and data collection. In addition, the final chapters discuss the writing and dissemination of reports, and ethics in evaluation. ***Available through bookstores.*** ◆

Jessica Chapel
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HFRP

Beyond Basic Training
Continued from page 10

empowered with information. Parents have shared their knowledge of managed care with other parents and have learned how to make changes in the system. Because they now know both how managed care is supposed to work and how consumers actually fare, team members are confident in expressing their needs and recommendations to government officials. ◆

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Theory and Practice
Continued from page 4

They also developed a valid, reliable way to assess an agency's implementation of wrap-around — again, a contribution to the field. Participants point out, however, that innovative approaches are not always welcome by everyone; in some cases, the greatest resistance comes from the research community itself.

- ***Informing the family support field***

While the Grants Program allows for flexibility in evaluation and measurement design, the challenge is how the information gathered from three very different sites can come together and speak to the larger family support field. While cross-site comparisons would be useful, the uniqueness of each organization is well-served by the Grants Program approach. Participants suggest that while all programs share common dimensions, specifying these dimensions can be difficult. Some suggest that they might include similarity of client populations or the particular program approach applied (i.e., prevention or treatment). Another suggestion for examining commonality would be to examine how different organizations respond to the same environmental threat, such as welfare reform.

Conclusion

In advancing an innovative approach to funding evaluation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation sought to improve the relevance of evaluation for program staff. The experience of three programs implementing this approach suggests that the flexibility inherent in such an approach fosters more productive and supportive relationships between programs and evaluation staff, provides information of greater use to programs, and promotes reflective practice. This experience also shows that evaluation is never easy — relationships need to be nurtured, opportunities to share experiences must be created, and sustainability of evaluation work needs to be considered. Perhaps the greatest challenge to organizations funding such evaluation approaches is how to translate program-level findings into messages that influence a broader audience. ◆

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Those interested in learning more about the evaluations of each of these programs and/or receiving copies of evaluation reports, should contact the following people: Sister Mary Paul, Director of Clinical Services, Center for Family Life, 345 43rd Street, Brooklyn, New York 11232, Tel: (718) 788-3500; Karl Dennis, Kaleidoscope, 1279 N. Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622, Tel: (773) 278-7200; Deborah Daro, Research Director, National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse, 200 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1700, Chicago, IL 60604, Tel: (312) 663-3520.

HFRP would like to thank the evaluators and program directors who shared their insights with us in such an open and collaborative spirit: Sister Mary Paul and Sister Mary Geraldine from the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park; Harriet Meyer, Karen Freel, and Michael Sullivan from the Ounce of Prevention Fund; Deborah Daro from the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse; Karl Dennis and Ron Hardy from Kaleidoscope; Michael Epstein and Janet McKelvey from Northern Illinois University; and Peg Hess, Brenda McGowan, and Michael Botsko from the Columbia University School of Social Work.

NEW *FAMILIES MATTER* PUBLICATIONS FROM HFRP

The following reports are part of the ongoing *Families Matter* series published by HFRP. Each paper examines the challenges to training child care providers to deliver family support, and the rationale for and ways of including family support in the definition of quality child care.

- *Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies: Training Child Care Providers to Support Families*

by Holly M. Kreider and Tracey L. Hurd

Profiles the family-supportive efforts of Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, drawing from a national survey and in-depth interviews.

- *Family-Centered Child Care*

by M. Elena Lopez

Details indispensable techniques for training staff to support families through child care programs.

- *Making Families Matter at Two-Year Colleges: Training the Early Childhood Workforce to Support Families*

by Julia Coffman

Examines the extent to which two-year colleges offer family-centered training for early childhood professionals.

To obtain these publications, please contact the HFRP publications department at (617) 496-4304.

CYFERNet: Evaluation Tools
http://www.cyfernet.mes.umn.edu/eval.html
The CYFERNet Evaluation Tools Web page, maintained by the Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network, offers information on topics such as health, youth development, and welfare reform. The site also offers technology tools and several evaluation instruments, such as a community-level baseline survey and an organizational change survey.

Multimedia Development Tools
http://mime1.marc.gatech.edu/MM_Tools/evaluation.html
Developed to help the producers of software and other media assess the performance of their products, this site provides evaluation tools general enough for other purposes, including an evaluation matrix, an anecdotal record form, focus group protocol, interview protocol, and an evaluation report sample.

Hospital Council of Western Pennsylvania
http://www.hcwp.org/pe.html
This site offers evaluation resource pages with an evaluation primer that provides guidelines for evaluations. Sections are devoted to discussing the types of programs which benefit from evaluation, the stages of evaluation, and the audiences for a completed evaluation. An online bibliography and directory provide site users with additional resources.

The Center for Health Promotion, University of Toronto
http://www.utoronto.ca/chp/hcu
The Health Communications Unit, part of The Center of Health Promotion at the University of Toronto, offers the *Evaluating Health Promotions Programs* workbook on this site. The guide is useful, providing a simple, step-by-step approach to evaluation. Other relevant workbooks and publications, as well as links, are also available.

National Network for Family Resiliency
http://www.nnfr.org
This site provides abstracts of evaluation tools and a bibliography of evaluation resources. Other resources available include an interactive evaluation site, which is a program that allows the user to work through the evaluation process.

The Grantmakers Evaluation Network
http://hogg1.lac.utexas.edu/Gen
The Grantmakers Evaluation Network (GEN), an affinity group of the Council on Foundations, provides a list of recently published books on evaluation, and downloadable versions of the GEN newsletter focusing on evaluation issues relevant to the philanthropic community.

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HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE EVALUATION EXCHANGE:

Emerging Strategies in Evaluating Child and Family Services

Volume IV, Number 3/4 1998 — Free Quarterly Newsletter

From the Director's Desk

Heather B. Weiss
Director, HFRP

The notions of "learning organizations" and "organizational learning" are very popular these days. Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, who first discussed organizational learning in the 1970s, promote the idea of double-loop learning. This learning results in changes in organizational values and promotes a fundamental transformation of the organization such that it is more successful and productive.[1] Peter Senge, who has popularized organizational learning with his book, *The Fifth Discipline*, describes five characteristics of learning organizations: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning.[2]

As we struggle to face the large-scale changes affecting our work — accountability, devolution, information technology, a new century — the dynamism, flexibility, and opportunity implied by an organizational learning approach is compelling. But what does it take for organizations that serve children and families to become "learning organizations"? What constraints do they face? How do they actually do it? Who needs to be involved?

This issue of *The Evaluation Exchange* is the first of two which examine these questions. We have brought together a variety of perspectives that we hope will stimulate thinking and discussion on this important topic. Our Theory and Practice section summarizes a paper that William Morrill and I authored on how to develop and promote useful learning in public programs. The article suggests that organizational learning in the policy arena must involve the creation of a "learning community" of policymakers, researchers, evaluators, and practitioners and sets forth for discussion a model for implementing a learning approach in the public sector. In our Promising Practices section, we include two articles about approaches for creating a public policy learning community that actively involves citizens. William Novelli of the

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[1] Argyris, Chris & Schön, Donald A. (1996). *Organizational learning II: Theory, method, and practice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing.

[2] Senge, Peter M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Currency Doubleday.

IN THIS ISSUE:

LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

- Useful Learning for Public Action....2
- Making the Case for Children....5
- Civic Participation and the Citizens Research Method....7
- Interview with Patricia McGinnis....8
- Building State and Local Evaluation Capacity: The U.S. Department of Justice's Evaluation Strategy....10
- Studying Learning Initiatives: The Experience of the Empowerment Zones/ Enterprise Communities National Learning Initiative....11
- State Policy Documentation Project: Data Collection and Dissemination....13
- Lessons Learned....14
- New and Noteworthy....15
- Electronic Mailbox....16

National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids writes about implementing an information campaign to inform citizens and policymakers about children's health. HFRP researcher Serene Fang writes about the Citizens Research process, a technique to better inform and engage citizens in understanding and influencing the policy-making process. Our Questions and Answers section presents a conversation with Patricia McGinnis of The Council for Excellence in Government about how accountability and organizational learning in the public sector come together. As interest in and experimentation with learning endeavors grow, being able to evaluate their effectiveness will be important. In our Evaluations to Watch section, Andy Mott of the Center for Community Change and Vicki Creed of Learning Partners discuss an approach they used to evaluate learning through the National Learning Initiative of the Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities Project. In one of our Spotlight sections, Lisa Plimpton of the Center for Law and Social Policy discusses work that CLASP is doing to document state policies on welfare reform. In another Spotlight article, Michael Quinn Patton of The Union Institute and Ricardo A. Millett of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation look at criteria that distinguish casual/informal notions of lessons learned from "high quality" lessons learned. In our Beyond Basic Training section, Robert Kirchner of the U.S. Department of Justice discusses work that his agency has been doing to strengthen evaluation capacity at the state and local levels. Finally, in our New and Noteworthy and Electronic Mailbox sections, we provide information on current resources to assist those interested in learning organizations.

Organizations are increasingly asked to undertake many challenges with fewer resources and under greater scrutiny. Organizational learning theory and practice may help us to better understand and implement productive and relevant ways in which to do so. ◆

For information on submitting articles to *The Evaluation Exchange*, please call (617) 495-9108 or visit our Web site: http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/eval

Useful Learning for Public Action

As America struggles with globalization and devolution, allocation of scarce resources, and growing public demand for accountable and cost-effective services, the demand for and the use of information to guide decision-making should be at an all-time high. They are not. Despite substantial investment that has been made in knowledge development over the years, experience shows that information about public programs has often not been used for policy formation, program design, or the high performance management of existing services (Darman, 1997; Levitan, 1992).

Now is an opportune time to begin working to make our knowledge development investments, including evaluation, more useful in the country's efforts to solve its basic problems.

Now is an opportune time to begin working to make our knowledge development investments, including evaluation, more useful in the country's efforts to solve its basic problems. To a great extent, the conditions, experience, and ingredients necessary to generate and use knowledge are largely in place. The pervasive, multi-level push for greater accountability has resulted in a new demand for a wide array of high-quality information to support policymakers and program managers as well as growing practical experience with indicators. There is also growing knowledge about how to build the capacity of public managers, community groups, and non-profit organizations to use performance and other data from management information systems in an ongoing way to improve performance and outcomes (Usher, 1993; Gray and Associates, 1998). Additionally, domestic policy initiatives, such as standards-driven educational reform, managed care, and the privatization of human services, are forcing a critical examination of how best to invest limited research and evaluation dollars. The evaluation field itself has also changed, moving from a focus on single, large-scale experiments to more flexible, participatory, and community-based studies. Finally, the recent devolution of responsibility for welfare programs to the state and local levels (and the flexibility and governance changes implied by this shift) provides an unparalleled opportunity to develop the multi-level capacity to generate and use information to improve outcomes for our nation's people significantly.

To move to a truly relevant system of information, we must strive to institutionalize knowledge development and use so that programs can continuously improve and be more accountable. Private-sector experience suggests that we must create "learning organizations." A learning organization is able to create, acquire, and transfer knowledge as well as modify its own behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights (Garvin, 1993). To be successful "learners," organizations must be willing and have the capacity to use data on a regular basis, assess implications, and make changes accordingly.

Experience with past information building endeavors points to eight lessons that can guide the creation of public sector learning organizations:

1) Investing in knowledge building should be strategic in concept, targeted to maximize impact.

2) Learning must consider the incremental and iterative nature of the policy and decision-making process and

thus should be structured to flow as continuously as possible at all levels.

3) Collaboration among the research/evaluation, the policy, and the practitioner communities is necessary.

4) An improved learning system must make reasonable judgments about the content and timing of expectations for learning activities and the consequences that flow from results. It needs to emphasize low-risk learning, especially at the outset.

5) Selection of learning methodologies must be judicious, both in terms of learning objectives and timing.

6) Investment in a variety of data collection strategies, including an integrative MIS in support of operations, needs to be considered.

7) Efforts will require strong federal leadership and support and should build on information and indicator work already underway.

8) More integrated funding of evaluations and programs will be important in developing continuous learning systems that improve outcomes.

The first step in building a learning system is developing the common ground that unites the three communities relevant to the development of public sector learning organizations: the knowledge-building community, the policy and managerial community, and the professional services ("doing") community. This common ground includes:

- ***Development of a Collaborative Learning Agenda***. Multiple forces push agencies to develop learning agendas, including the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and the congressional reauthorization process. A learning agenda should be built around a learning process that emphasizes sequential learning, iterative and participatory processes, use of the full range of learning methodologies, and attendance to means whereby learning will be communicated for both policy and program improvement purposes. A longer-range objective of building the research agenda and the evaluation strategy should be the creation of learning organizations.

- ***Performance Goals and Measures***. Given the explosion of interest in performance indicators and standards due to the accountability movement, both the policy and the learning communities have an opportunity and interest in coming together for a discussion about what goals are being sought and what measures will be used to judge how well they are being achieved.

- ***Allocation of Resources***. Financial support will be necessary to implement the research agenda and the new learning approaches. All parties will want to move sequentially with more resources and then assess the results.

- ***Accountability Consequences***. All stakeholders must have reasonable expectations for and promises about their collective efforts. There should also be clarity and agreement about the consequences of the learning process from the outset.

- ***Education and Communication***. The three communities must work together on an education and ongoing communications component. Actors who have been talking at and sometimes past each other need to communicate clearly with each other, and the groups included in the dialogue should be broadened. More attention needs to be paid to the creation of a dissemination strategy in order to maximize the many potential payoffs from research and evaluation.

> The first step in building a learning system is developing common ground...

In order to begin the discussion about how to improve knowledge development and learning in the public sector, we propose a model for a continuous learning system. This model seeks to create continuous opportunities for the development and use of relevant information; for encouraging corrective actions, risk taking, and participation; and for recognition and rewards for performance improvement. It is intended to stimulate thinking about a learning system and will be revised based on comment and through examination of efforts to implement systems like it at the federal, state, and local levels. The model envisions a continuous, five-stage learning process:

1) Engage key stakeholders in strategic planning and set learning agenda and performance goals and standards. Activities in this step include obtaining resources and commitment to learning, specifying performance goals, identifying research and evaluation questions and gaps, and designing an overall learning agenda.

2) Learn from experience and relevant research and incorporate lessons into program/policy design. Activities here include assembling resources, specifying outcome and process measures and data to support them, networking to share successful innovations and identify common problems, and identifying technical assistance needs and providers.

3) Engage in innovation, monitoring, and evaluation. Activities include continuously testing new ideas and approaches, designing evaluation, and monitoring and assessing process and progress with performance measures, evaluation, and data.

4) Learn from evaluation and comparisons with others and make course corrections. Activities include using monitoring and evaluation information for corrections and improvement, using benchmarking to examine progress of the program and/or field of practice/policy, and assessing and applying knowledge from relevant basic and applied research.

5) Transfer lessons for program respecification and identify knowledge gaps for further research and experimentation. Activities here include identifying gaps for further research and

transferring knowledge for continuous improvement across the network and service/policy field.

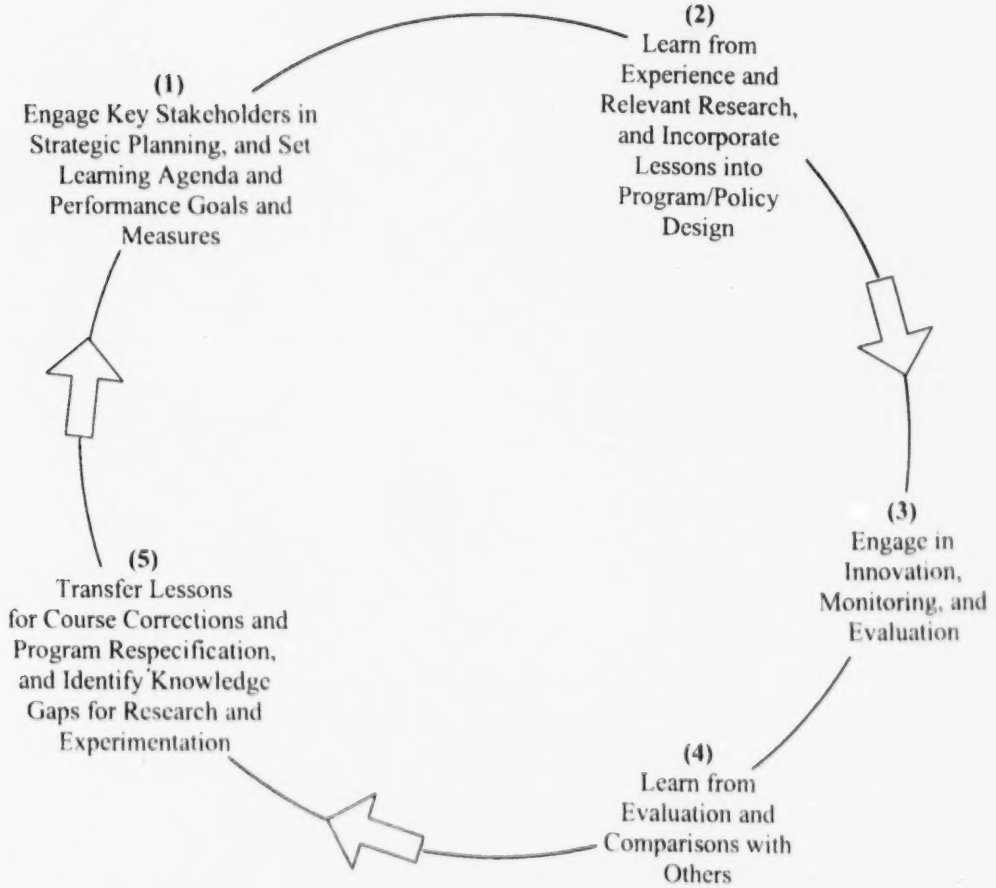
There are examples of organizations that have worked to apply such a learning model. They suggest the feasibility of such learning models and offer cases to use to see if such approaches appeal to *both* the policy and learning communities. Over the next few years, as devolution and accountability are further implemented, there will no doubt be more experiences and opportunities to implement a learning model such as this. At the same time, a series of related and supporting actions could be taken to better connect knowledge, policy, and practice. These include:

- Systematic learning agendas could be added to the strategic planning, annual performance plans, and performance measures now incorporated at the federal level in GPRA and similar GPRA-like requirements at the state level.
- Similar learning agendas could be continued as newly added to reauthorization legislation.
- Public sponsors could offer increased regulatory flexibility in return for clear outcome accountability to provide incentives for innovation.
- Foundations and corporate philanthropy could make a significant contribution to the development of institutional capacity for learning at the grassroots level.
- While retaining their own identities, public agencies and private foundations could be far more effective in the aggregate by being considerably more open with each other and specific about their individual learning agendas.
- Public and private agencies could invest more systematically in the development of knowledge about what works.

The framework presented here has many of the key features that we believe are necessary for a new learning and knowledge-building strategy that

Continued on page 14

CONTINUOUS LEARNING SYSTEM


(1)
Engage Key Stakeholders in Strategic Planning, and Set Learning Agenda and Performance Goals and Measures
(2)
Learn from Experience and Relevant Research, and Incorporate Lessons into Program/Policy Design
(3)
Engage in Innovation, Monitoring, and Evaluation
(4)
Learn from Evaluation and Comparisons with Others
(5)
Transfer Lessons for Course Corrections and Program Respecification, and Identify Knowledge Gaps for Research and Experimentation

Making the Case for Children

Too often, the political rhetoric surrounding efforts to improve children's health and welfare does not accurately reflect the actions taken to carry out these goals. Local and state governments are often limited by inadequate federal policies or budgets in what they can do to help families. That is why grassroots activists are so important if we are substantially to improve the results for children and families. Doing so, however, will require that advocates learn how to "make the case for children" more effectively; they must motivate activists to help stimulate coverage of children's issues in the mass media (thereby raising the profile of these issues and increasing pressure for social change), and raise the stakes for elected representatives and government officials.

So, how can we do a better job of making this case? First, we must recognize that change must be broad in order to be deep. That is, we must strive simultaneously for *environmental* change (through public policy and agenda setting); for change at the *community* level (by affecting norms, expectations, and public support); and for changes in *individual behavior* (through skill teaching, positive reinforcement, and rewards). Accomplishing broad-based change requires communication at both the mass media and interpersonal levels in order to extend the reach and frequency — or *pervasiveness* — of key messages. It also necessitates galvanizing many change agents to create the critical mass needed to bring about substantive movement.

Prochaska and DiClemente's model of individual behavior change provides clues about how to spur individuals toward greater involvement. The model includes four stages:

- *Pre-contemplation.* In this first stage, which includes most people, individuals don't see the relevance of getting involved. They are either unaware of an issue (for example, new legislation on children's health insurance), or do not see how it applies to them (they may be childless, or assume that children have access to health care if the parents truly want it).

- *Contemplation.* During this phase, individuals will consider greater involvement in an issue, such as seeking more information.

- *Action.* In order to move from contemplation to concrete action, people must see the benefits of the activity to themselves and/or to society. It is important that the "costs" of involvement be kept to a minimum, as even the slightest barriers may act as deterrents. Increased social pressure can also help to move individuals from contemplation to action.

- *Maintenance.* Once people do get involved in an issue, it is important to remind them that they are helping to make progress, and to recognize their efforts. This stage of social advocacy is too often neglected, and activists can be lost through this lapse of attention. Progress reports, report cards, rewards, and reminders for activists are critical for helping to maintain their involvement.

So, how can we do a better job of making this case? We must recognize that change must be broad in order to be deep.

Children's advocates need to determine exactly what they want the public to do to help solve a particular problem, then look for ways to move individuals along this type of continuum. With research, analysis, and strategic thinking, the framework can be filled in.

Our *Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids* did this when building our National Action Network (NAN), a growing database of some 14,000 individuals from around the country who have expressed willingness to be involved in the issue of reducing the tobacco industry's powerful hold on children. We keep NAN members engaged by providing useful information on key Congressional votes, tobacco money in politics, initiatives to protect kids, and activities and contacts in their local areas. NAN members are asked to write to their elected representatives, write letters to the editor, speak out at local meetings, and take other action, as appropriate.

Before creating this network, we conducted substantial research to find out more about people who are, or are likely to become, consumer activists: specifically, what motivates them to get involved, whether they care about the issue of children and tobacco, and how we might encourage them to take on a more active role. We knew from polling data that there was interest in protecting children from tobacco, but we had to turn public opinion into citizen action.

We began by analyzing a large marketing database (Simmons) that reports on all manner of product usage, media habits, and other consumer behaviors. This database also profiled what it defined as consumer activists, and estimated this group to be approximately 20 percent of the adult U.S. population. Consumer activists were defined as adults who had, in the past year, contacted a radio or TV station, magazine or newspaper editor, or elected official; met personally with an elected official; actively participated in a local civic issue and/or volunteered for an environmental or conservation group; or addressed a public meeting.

We then conducted a phone survey to confirm the profile and assess levels of

concern about our own issue and the likelihood of people getting involved in it. Finally, using a qualitative research technique, one-on-one interviews with individuals who fit the consumer activist profile, we probed to find what information and ideas were most appealing, and gained comprehension and reaction to a number of message concepts. We found that activists are most likely to get involved when an issue affects them personally; when they perceive a blatant wrong, untruth, or injustice; or when they observe a threatening situation. Our research also showed that activists prefer to work within an existing organization or effort, rather than initiating action themselves. Many are driven to action by personal appeals from people they know.

In testing message concepts with consumer activists to see how they would respond, we found that we had to be careful when presenting messages that Congress was beholden to the tobacco industry and might act in the industry's favor. This is because activists are most motivated to act when they think their actions will make a difference, and a feeling of hopelessness (Congress is in the industry's pocket) worked against this motivation. We also found that activists did not respond positively to general messages about the health of children or saving lives, but preferred messages with a specific call to action. Interestingly, in testing messages that assailed specific individuals from the tobacco industry (e.g., a woman who is the senior vice president for external affairs for Philip Morris), we found that respondents were not comfortable with such personal attacks, despite their contempt for the industry as a whole.

Overall, our research taught us the following:

- Localize the issue to motivate activists, who respond to issues that directly affect their families and communities.
- Focus on kids in order to engage activists (smoking among adults is not as emotionally engaging).
- Engage activists emotionally by making them perceive a threat, or by generating anger and/or moral outrage.
- Portray the fight as winnable; let them know that others are involved and are succeeding.
- Time messages and calls to specific actions at intervals when these actions will have the greatest impact.
- Provide factual information, especially on the scope of the problem and threats from Congress.
- Encourage activists to personally approach others, since other potential activists react favorably to this.

Clearly, it is important to know your audience. In the case of children's health, key audiences includes policymakers, "influentials" (who vary depending upon the subject area), activists, and the general public. In the case of youth smoking, youth advocacy is an important strategy for us, and young activists play a particularly critical role in capturing the attention of policymakers and the public. Children often make the strongest advocates for issues that directly affect them, because they have first-hand experience with the problems they face (and are therefore credible spokespeople), and because they elicit an emotional response from those in a position to effect change.

> ...activists are most motivated to act when they think their actions will make a difference.

At the same time, it is critical not to overplay the "child card" when advocating for children. These images are in danger of being overworked, so all messages pertaining to children must be believable and real in order to maintain their effectiveness.

One helpful tool is to put a face on the problem by focusing on a "villain." In the case of youth smoking, highlighting the tobacco industry's unethical behavior in targeting children in its marketing campaigns has been extremely effective. Not only does it draw an emotional response from the public and policymakers, but the media are oriented toward stories with built-in controversy, and this one has a clear villain that guarantees heated debate.

These tools and lessons can be adapted to any children's issue. It is important is to keep in mind that many agents of change are needed to achieve significant results and improve the lives of children. Do not rely on mass media alone. Do your research, identify your target audiences, and engage the activists who are most likely to help you achieve your goals. ◆

William D. Novelli
President
National Center for
Tobacco-Free Kids

THE EVALUATOR'S INSTITUTE

The fourth Evaluator's Institute will be held in Washington, DC from July 19-24, 1999. The Institute brings together internationally recognized leaders in the practice of evaluation to plan and teach courses on evaluation issues. This year's offerings include courses on basic program evaluation; sampling; implementation analysis; cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis; evaluating community collaborations and building their capacity; developing program theory; using qualitative methods; learning from data; needs assessment; graphical displays; evaluating social programs and policies; efficient and effective data gathering; and reducing and managing evaluation anxiety. Courses range in price from $375 to $995; past participant and institutional discounts are available. The deadline for course registration and payment is July 1, 1999. Those interested should contact the Institute at (703) 448-8324. Additional information about the Institute is available through the Institute's Web site: http://www.erols.com/cwisler

Civic Participation and the Citizens Research Method

Before his now-famous 1995 essay, *Bowling Alone*, political scientist Robert Putnam published a book titled *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, in which he compared local Italian governments in the North to those in the South after Italy transferred power and responsibility for many of its services from a centralized government to newly-created regional governments. Putnam contended that local governments in the North tended to be more successful and efficient than local governments in the South because citizens in the North possessed a long historical and cultural tradition of participating in associational life that citizens in the South lacked.

> ...our engagement with our communities, and indeed, with democracy itself, is no longer what it should be.

At a time when our own government is engaged in a "devolution revolution," passing down many of its social welfare functions from the federal to state and local levels, Putnam now makes the case that Americans are behaving less like Northern Italians and more like the civically-isolated Southern Italians. He argues that Americans' participation in conventional voluntary associations (the PTA, Elks Clubs, bowling leagues) has been declining for the last 40 years, and that this trend has contributed to an overall weakening of the civic engagement and social capital of local communities. The widespread interest in his theory may be an indication of how others have also noted that our engagement with our communities, and indeed, with democracy itself, is no longer what it should be.

The Harvard Family Research Project has been exploring methods for addressing citizen engagement in policies that affect local communities. One such method is the Citizens Research process. Citizens Research is a variation of the Citizens Jury process developed by Ned Crosby at the Jefferson Center in Minnesota. Both share characteristics of other recently developed processes such as Richard Sclove's Citizens' Panel, Michael Briand's Community Convention, and the Danish Consensus Conference. All of these techniques seek to increase the opportunity for deliberative democracy to have an effect on the policy-making process, especially for policy-making done at the local level. Specifically, these methods share the following characteristics:

- Citizens from a community are selected through a random survey and arrayed in a group that is representative of the community in terms of demographic characteristics and relevant attitudes.
- The group is charged with a specific task regarding an issue or policy problem
- Over a series of meetings, the group is educated about the issue by experts and witnesses representing a range of views.

For Further Reading:

Briand, Michael K. *Building deliberative communities*. A report prepared for the Pew Partnership for Civic Change.

Crosby, Ned. (April 1996). *Creating an authentic voice of the people*. Paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association, April 1996.

Lemann, Nicholas. (1996). Kicking in groups. *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 277, no. 4.

Putnam, Robert D. (1996). The strange disappearance of civic America. *The American Prospect*, no. 24.

Putnam, Robert D. (1995). Bowling alone. *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 6, no. 1.

Sclove, Richard E. (1994). *Technology, society, and democracy: New problems and opportunities*. A report prepared for the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

For Additional Information:

The Citizens Jury Method
The Jefferson Center
7101 York Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55435
Tel: (612) 926-3292
Fax: (612) 926-3199
http://www.usinternet.com/users/jcenter

The Citizens Research Method
The Citizens Research Group
1650 Franklynn Dr.
Furlong, PA 18925
Tel: (215) 794-5475
Fax: (215) 794-5477
Twstclaire@aol.com

The Citizens' Panel Method
The Loka Institute
P.O. Box 355
Amherst, MA 01004
Tel: (413) 582-5860
Fax: (413) 582-5811
http://www.amherst.edu/~loka

The Community Convention Method
The Community Self-Leadership Project
Campus Box 308
Trinidad State Junior College
Tel: (719) 846-5240
Contact: Michael Briand

The Civic Practices Network (http://www.cpn.org/sections/tools/models/deliberative_democracy) maintains a Web site on deliberative democracy which provides an introduction to basic concepts, links to additional sources, and a suggested reading list.

- The group is given adequate time to debate and deliberate together after which they are asked to make a collective recommendation.

- Recommendations are shared with the public.

A key source of legitimacy for this method lies in the extent to which the group represents the larger community. In Crosby's words, the selection process creates "an authentic voice of the people" for the community that is selected. Another key strength lies in the citizens' experience of informed and collective deliberation.

For evaluation purposes, this method focuses attention on an important aspect of program assessment. While other methods may be employed to answer the question of whether goals are being attained in a program's design, implementation, and effectiveness (and if not, why not), this method provides information as to whether the program itself reflects the public will of the community in which it is situated.

Some people have argued that big government contributed to the weakening of American civic engagement because it fostered the perception that a large and professionalized bureaucracy takes away the opportunity, perhaps even the need, for civic initiative. The Citizens Research or Citizens Jury process can serve as a bridge for engaging a community with few other forums for public discussion, in issues that will increasingly be decided not at the level of federal government, but at the theoretically more responsive level of local government. ◆

Serene Fang
Research Assistant
HFRP

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If you were not able to complete the reader survey we included in our last issue, please take a few minutes to do so now. Your responses will help us to better address your needs for evaluation information. The survey is also available on our Web site: http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Interview with Patricia McGinnis

Substantial changes have taken place in the public sector recently. One of the most important has been the focus on results-based accountability. At the federal level, accountability has been codified in the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993, which requires federal agencies to develop strategic plans and report annually on their performance. At the same time that accountability systems are being firmly set in place, interest in the notion of "organizational learning" in the public sector has grown. Learning organizations seek to improve outcomes through a dynamic process that enables them to collect, utilize, and act on data in an organizational climate that supports and fosters change. Organizational learning, like accountability, has the potential to improve policy and program decision making. We asked Patricia McGinnis, President and CEO of The Council for Excellence in Government, to discuss the potential of and constraints to public sector organizational learning in the current climate of accountability.

Organizational learning, like accountability, has the potential to improve policy and program decision making.

1) What does organizational learning mean in the context of public organizations?

The concept of organizational learning is not terribly different in the public and private sectors. It means building upon what works and exhibiting a willingness to change, probably continuously, in order to be more effective. Operationally, organizational learning in both sectors has the same components, although the components may look a little different, but there is, to some extent, a greater complexity in the public sector in the area of measurement and even in the area of setting goals. For organizational learning to occur, the organization needs to have very clear goals, priorities, and measures. You need to have an alignment of goals and measures for people, for budgeting and financial management, and for assessing organizational results. You also need — and this is tremendously important — clear communication among people working in the organization and with stakeholders, partners, and customers. In the case of the public sector, this means not just customers, but the citizens you are serving, whether they are direct customers or not.

Alignment of goals is extremely important. In many public organizations, I've noticed that the personnel system, the budget system, the financial management system, and now the GPRA strategic planning system, are operating on separate tracks. There is no consistency among the goals and measures for each of these systems, and alignment of these is essential for organizational success. For example, people in teams need to have specific goals and measures that are consistent with the larger organizational goals and strategic planning; their role in meeting an organization's ultimate goals needs to be very clear.

When it is very clear what you are trying to accomplish, then people can be very smart and creative about how to organize themselves to accomplish well-understood goals. This means more than just the work of teams within an organizational structure; it means thinking about how to reach out to those outside the organization and make them part of the team. In this sense, the public is very important. The public is not involved enough now, and we see the consequences of that in the lack of public confidence and trust in government. I think there is a communications gap between

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the government and the broader public. It is hard for organizations to deal with the public; it is easier for them to work with their direct stakeholders, those organizations really interested in what they are doing and the customers they are directly serving. But if organizations look at what the public is saying about the things they care about, they can learn and perhaps reach out to involve the public more effectively. This year in the Innovations in American Government awards, we saw several examples of organizations that were really engaging the public in setting priorities and implementing their programs. Their work was improved because of this, and I think they were getting more support from the public and legislatures.

2) Are accountability and organizational learning at odds?

They are very compatible, but not the same. Accountability can be seen as measuring results against clearly stated goals. Organizational learning involves goals and measurements, but as you look at what is happening, you are open to changing the goals and priorities and adjusting them, based on what you are learning and the information you are seeing. Hopefully, accountability encompasses organizational learning but I do not think, at this point, that the flexibility implied by organizational learning is often included in the concept of accountability.

It is very important in a system like GPRA to create a greater understanding and trust between managers in the government agencies and in the Congress so that there is an interest in learning about both what is working and what is not working and to avoid a "gotcha" mentality. We need to build upon what works and try to adapt or change what is not working. I think this is happening in some cases, such as in the transportation area. The Department of Transportation is using the strategic planning process to try to bring the various transportation modes together and to focus on specific goals and measures. The authorizing committee is working very constructively with the Department to learn from this information and to use it to improve the design of these programs. This process has worked because of leadership and trust between the Department and the Congressional committee. But it is also important to recognize that in transportation, safety is a very clear goal for which there are some fairly good measures, even though measurement can still be improved. It is also a goal that is very compelling to the public. Thus, transportation has the ingredients to be successful. In some organizations, where the outcomes are not so easily measured and not so clear or compelling, it is a little more difficult. It is useful, however, to have models that do work, and we should focus on agencies like the Department of Transportation to get the process right and learn from that.

To do this right requires more than just smart planning; it requires creating a team spirit around priorities and goals.

To do this right requires more than just smart planning; it requires creating a team spirit around priorities and goals. Right now, a lot of agencies are worried that Congress will punish them in the appropriations process, so they are not necessarily willing to put everything out on the table in the way that they would if there were a real partnership. I think we have a long way to go on that, and I am not sure how it is going to work out in GPRA, but it has the right components and the right players, with the Congress having a major role. The opportunity is there.

3) What is necessary for public organizations to be accountable and to be learning organizations?

I think that in terms of organizational dynamics, there must be teamwork, communication, and trust. People are coming from different perspectives, and they need to build a certain trust that they are working on the same agenda. You need clear goals. A lot of goals that I see are not clear; they are very process oriented. You need goals that focus on the end results and on the results that are important to the public interest. Then, you need measures that really do measure effectiveness.

You need leadership that communicates and motivates. When you see a successful organization, you generally see that kind of leadership. In terms of information management, you need to give managers and teams data about what is working, in a very useable and accessible way. Technology, particularly the Internet, is making that easier. It is also making what is going on a lot more transparent, not only to managers but also to the people being served and others.

It is very important to recognize and celebrate success, particularly of teams and whole organizations. I tend to think that a strong focus on individual incentives, in terms of bonuses and other financial incentives, can be counterproductive. It is best not to focus on an individual who is trying to show that he or she has done something spectacular. You want individuals who work effectively as members of teams and whose goals are not individual goals but organizational ones.

I believe that if you have a good system of measurement and have defined the right results, you can trade flexibility for accountability using those measures. It is important not to micromanage and not to second guess how teams are operating, but rather to allow them to be creative. In fact, it is important to encourage them to take some risks — and even to fail, and to learn from their failure.

It is really encouraging that this subject is being discussed so widely and is becoming a fundamental part of the process of planning and management. I am very encouraged by the passage of GPRA, even though we do not yet know how well it will work. There is a lot of potential, and the fact that the public is really demanding results helps. If legislators, managers, and frontline deliverers of services can all focus on results, then I think we will see much greater value given to organizational learning. ◆

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Building State and Local Evaluation Capacity: The U.S. Department of Justice's Evaluation Strategy

In response to Attorney General Janet Reno's call to "find out what works and spread the word," the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), a component of the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), U.S. Department of Justice, is implementing a comprehensive, multi-tiered program evaluation strategy. This strategy is designed to disseminate findings of locally produced evaluations of BJA-funded projects; stimulate program evaluations at the state and local levels through evaluation capacity building, grant programs, and technical assistance; strengthen BJA's partnership with state Administrative Agencies (SAAs), practitioners, and researchers; and build a cooperative framework for interagency coordination.

The Initiative has six components:

Effective Programs Initiative: Under this initiative, begun in FY 1997, BJA publishes a series highlighting innovative programs which have undergone intensive evaluation at the state and/or local levels. It publishes these results in an *Effective Programs Monograph* series. The first of these, on improving the nation's criminal justice system, was published in December 1997. The second in the series will focus on creating a new criminal justice system for the 21st century.

Tools for the Criminal Justice Community: Launched in August 1998, this initiative provides an "Electronic Roadmap for Evaluation," an automated version of a comprehensive evaluation handbook (*Assessment and Evaluation Handbook Series*) for planners, researchers and evaluators, and local practitioners. The Evaluation Technical Assistance Web site, which is part of BJA's Homepage (www.bja.evaluationwebsite.org), provides extensive new evaluation resources and materials, and is the first of its kind developed by a public agency for general use.

Enhancing State and Local Assessment and Evaluation Capabilities: Through a federal, state, and local partnership, assessment and evaluation have been increasingly institutionalized. There has been an increase in the professional staff assigned exclusively to evaluation duties (34 states now have such staff), yearly funds allocated to evaluation have increased over time, and the number of states funding external, independent evaluation grows each year.

The State Evaluation Development (SED) Program: Through this Program, BJA provides technical assistance to jurisdictions needing direct help with capacity building. Evaluation technical assistance and training for state and local practitioners, usually focused on specific program areas, is delivered in regional workshops, single-state settings, and multi-state workshops. Through the establishment of a state-to-state exchange program, BJA has supported evaluation capacity building initiatives by enabling experts from one jurisdiction to visit and provide technical assistance to another jurisdiction or by sending practitioners to other offices to learn its practices. SED also produced a series of nine publications, *Innovative State and Local Programs*, focusing on state and local strategies to improve the ability to obtain, publish, and disseminate documentation of promising practices. The publications were the result of nine working meetings that led to the documentation of 191 programs. Notably, those participating in the process have applied and institutionalized what they have learned in their own jurisdictions. As a separate activity to capture high quality programmatic information on strategy implementation across programs within specific program areas, BJA, in conjunction with state planners and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), has produced a series, *Highlighted State and Local Programs*. Almost 550 programs in three major program areas have been documented, and the reports are available on BJA's Web site.

The Byrne Evaluation Partnership Program: To increase the quality and use of evaluations conducted by state and local agencies, BJA created the evaluation partnership program as part of its Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Enforcement Assistance Program. The evaluation partnership program seeks to enhance collaborative evaluation among SAAs and creates a mechanism for enhancing the design, implementation, measurement, evaluation, and dissemination of information in high-priority program areas. Under this program, SAAs have principal responsibility for evaluation in coordination with funded program managers and evaluators at universities or other research organizations. SAAs apply to the program either individually or as coapplicants with other state and local agencies involved in planning, coordinating, administering, and/or evaluating criminal justice programs funded under the Byrne Formula Grant Program.

Annual Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Conference: BJA and NIJ, along with other OJP offices, sponsors an annual conference on research and evaluation in the criminal justice area. Through plenary sessions, panels and training workshops, criminal justice evaluators, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers come together to share experiences and knowledge. ◆

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Studying Learning Initiatives: The Experience of the Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities National Learning Initiative

The Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) Program, established by the Clinton Administration in 1993, is the most comprehensive federal program in recent years aimed at relieving severe stress in rural and urban areas. The Learning Initiative, developed in 1995 and based at the Community Partnership Center (CPC) of the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, was a project designed to pilot a participatory evaluation process in 10 of the 33 rural Empowerment Zones and Enterprise communities. This project was part of an overall movement toward community-based monitoring, which we have termed Community-based Monitoring, Learning, and Action (CMLA). CMLA helps people understand the views and values they share, work through their differences with others, develop longer-term strategies, and take carefully researched and planned actions that fit their contexts, priorities, and styles of operating. It is based in the traditions of community organizing, citizen monitoring, participatory action research, and popular education.

CMLA helps people understand the views and values they share, work through their differences with others, develop longer-term strategies, and take carefully researched and planned actions that fit their contexts, priorities, and styles of operating.

The Learning Initiative was radically different from traditional evaluations that rely on outside experts and that often examine and report on the success or failure of a program very late in its implementation or after its completion. The foundation of the Learning Initiative was composed of Learning Teams comprising between 8 and 20 local volunteers located in each site. Each of these Teams also had a part-time paid coordinator as well as access to the Regional Researcher. These teams were responsible for:

- meeting with Regional Researchers and staff to discuss the most appropriate ways to evaluate the progress and success of the EZ/EC program;
- gathering information locally to help in assessing progress made toward meeting the program's goals in the community and in identifying successes and obstacles to success;
- identifying lessons from the community's experience that should be shared with others;
- participating in workshops to share those lessons with other communities and with program leaders;
- sharing the findings with others in their own community through follow-up learning and educational activities.

Team members decided which of the EZ/EC's program's local goals were most important to them and, using a flexible evaluation tool called a "Learning Wheel" (see diagram, next page), each did its own monitoring, analysis, and reporting. The Learning Teams were expected to work with and share their findings with local EZ/EC boards, while maintaining sufficient autonomy to evaluate and discuss their findings freely and openly.

The Learning Initiative had three broad goals:

- capacity-building through development of skills and leadership of local participants in rural EZ/EC communities;
- continuous improvement of the program, through strengthened citizen participation, feedback, and accountability; and
- research and evaluation development through local documentation and learning.

CPC conducted a documentation of the pilot phase of the project (January 1996 - June 1997). This documentation included findings related to the early implementation of the EZ/EC program based on citizen monitoring and assessment of selected goals in the pilot communities, and findings related to the Learning Initiative approach.

To understand the Learning Initiative, researchers examined the extent to which the three broad goals were addressed. Learning Teams were asked to address the following questions:

1) How have you grown personally as a result of involvement with the Learning Initiative?

2) What have you learned through this process related to the Citizen Learning Team Model? What works and what doesn't? What have you learned "about" or "how to do" while working with the Learning Team in your community?

3) What have been the key findings of your Citizen Learning Team about the EZ/EC program? How did you reach these findings? To whom did you communicate them? What has been the response? What difference has it made so far? From the Citizens Learning Team perspective, what are the major successes and weaknesses of the EZ/EC program in your community?

4) What would you recommend to federal, state, and local governments about the EZ/EC program? What would you recommend to state and local governments about the Citizen Learning Team Model? What would you recommend to someone else who wished to start a Learning Team in their community? What would you recommend to the University about the Citizen Learning Team Model for Phase II?

In assessing the capacity-building activities of the Learning Initiative, researchers looked at skills that had been developed among team members; new and expanded networks that had been created; the extent to which team members had broader and more critical awareness of the political dynamics and culture of their communities; how confidence among members had been built; and changes in the ability of members to take on new roles. To understand the impact that the Learning Teams were having (much of this was too early to assess), researchers documented early policy changes, the role of Learning Teams in maintaining citizen participation and public accountability, the effectiveness of different structures, and the Learning Initiatives's contribution to continuous learning and improvement at the national level. Finally, to assess the influence on research and evaluation, researchers documented noteworthy team accomplishments and innovations in research, lessons on research design and approaches to measuring and monitoring, and linkages with the Regional Researchers.

Form a Learning Team
How will we work together?
Build a team.
What are our goals?
Listen to the community.
What do we need to learn and why?
Choose priorities for monitoring and measuring.
Identify indicators of success.
How will we find out about what we need to learn?
Develop ways to collect information.
Refine our methods through field tests.
Who will do what and when?
Create a plan.
Collect information.
What are we learning and what does it mean?
Analyze and assess.
How do we make changes with what we've learned?
Develop a strategy.
Take action.
What differences have we made?
Apply the Learning Cycle to ourselves and our work.
How do we celebrate our victories?
Recognize, honor, play.
What next?
Reflect, plan, act.
Phases for Learning Teams

Researchers used a variety of data sources to understand the Learning Initiative. These included documents, interviews, and participant observation. The main source of data for the analysis of the capacity-building component of the Learning Initiative were the Learning Teams themselves. Learning Teams produced and presented reports during the third cross-site meeting, which included answers to the questions given earlier in this article. In addition, Regional Researchers worked with the Learning Teams to develop qualitative case studies that provided in-depth accounts of the early implementation and progress of the EZ/EC program and the Learning Initiative. Two national cross-site sessions were held in which participants heard and analyzed case study presentations from each site and worked together to identify key themes, findings, and recommendations. Participants included Learning Team coordinators and team members from each community, Regional Researchers, Ford Foundation staff, USDA Policy and Planning staff, consultants, and CPC Learning Initiative staff.

Although the EZ/EC Learning Initiative pilot project has been completed, the Learning Teams have continued on a voluntary basis in some communities. As poor people feel the pinch of policy changes and budget cuts, their desire to learn what can be done opens many doors for enlarging community based constituencies engaged in participatory learning and education. Understanding how activities such as the EZ/EC Learning Initiative can help develop such capacity is critical to ensuring that voice is given to those traditionally excluded from the policy process. ◆

Andy Mott
Executive Director
Center for Community Change

Vicki Creed
Learning Partners

John Gaventa, Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, was the founder and initial director of the Learning Initiative. Vicki Creed followed John Gaventa as director of the Learning Initiative; she also has her own consultant practice, Learning Partners, in Knoxville, Tennessee.

State Policy Documentation Project: Data Collection and Dissemination

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) undertook the State Policy Documentation Project (SPDP) in 1997 to document and analyze policy choices made by the states in their TANF cash assistance, food stamp, and Medicaid programs. Enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 and the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, particularly the creation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, significantly altered the relationship between the federal and state governments in providing assistance to needy families. The federal legislation both offers substantial new discretion for states and imposes new requirements. The goal of the SPDP is to provide a detailed and accurate source of state policy information on these programs for advocates, policymakers, and researchers. The project will collect and disseminate data on written policy (statute, regulation, and policy manual), rather than on how policy is implemented or its impacts.

In the project's first year, staff and CLASP and CBPP developed five surveys, three on TANF policies, one on Medicaid, and one on food stamps, with a total of more than 1,000 questions. Most questions were framed with multiple choice or yes/no answers to facilitate comparison of policies across states. The surveys also include open-ended questions to allow for full explanation of state policies. The survey instruments contain substantial explanatory text to ensure that all respondents fully understand the questions. The SPDP provides more detail than other sources of information on state policy choices, because initial "threshold" questions are followed by a series of follow-up questions. For example, in addition to listing the circumstances under which a state extends cash assistance to families that have reached a time limit, the SPDP survey asks whether the duration and renewability of extensions vary by circumstance, and if there are any circumstances under which families can be disqualified from receiving extensions.

The topics in the TANF survey include application issues, categorical eligibility, financial eligibility, time limits, work activities and requirements, sanction provisions, child care, child support, program administration, entitlement, housing assistance interaction, and behavioral requirements. There is a separate survey on TANF policies with implications for reproductive health and teen parents, such as family caps, minor living arrangements, rules, family planning, abstinence education, and teen school and training requirements.

The food stamps survey topics include application procedures, financial and categorical eligibility, immigrants' eligibility, sanctions for non-compliance with work requirements, collections of over issuances, the three-month time limit, and employment and training activities. The Medicaid survey topics are the new eligibility category for families with children, family composition rules, transitional Medicaid assistance, sanctions, time limits, effects of TANF procedures on Medicaid, Medicaid for SSI children, and Medicaid for immigrants.

The volume of data SPDP is collecting is large. For example, the survey section on TANF applications contains subsections on policies on availability and processing of applications; the extent to which Medicaid, food stamps, and other benefits' applications are linked with cash assistance applications; requirements imposed on applicants; rules on personal responsibility contracts and employability plans applicants must sign; programs that divert applicants from cash assistance with one-time payments or other services; and the availability of emergency assistance.

In order to collect the data, SPDP contracted with "reporters," technically and substantively proficient policy analysts, in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Each reporter completes the surveys; SPDP then compiles and cleans the data, and sends reports on the survey answers to state officials at the TANF, Medicaid, or food stamps agency for confirmation. The final step is to resolve any discrepancies in interpretation of written policy between the survey respondents and state officials. In these cases, the written policy is the final authority. SPDP data are stored in databases, and an interface was developed that allows reporters to enter survey answers directly into the databases via the Internet.

Information on these state policies is in high demand. The scope of issue areas covered and the level of the detail of the information from the SPDP surveys are not available from other sources. For example, state-level advocates and policymakers learn about innovative policies being proposed and implemented in other states and are able to see how their policies compare to those across the nation. Researchers evaluating welfare related programs, particularly those looking at sites in different states, will use the policy information to inform their evaluation findings. Members of the media at both the national and state levels frequently request information from SPDP for stories on welfare reform policy trends. To further disseminate its information, SPDP is developing a Web site. SPDP reports will be advertised as they become available through networks of state reporters and partner organizations, through mailings to state officials, and by posting notices to electronic listservs for state and federal policymakers, researchers, policy analysts, and advocates.

SPDP is designing database reports for individual state summaries of the policies in each of the survey areas; state reports will be posted to the Web site individually as data are verified. Eventually, 50-state tables will be produced to allow for comparison of policies around the country. While making the data available will allow others to do state-specific, regional, and national analyses, SPDP staff will write and distribute issue-specific summaries based on the full range of issues covered by the five surveys. ◆

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Lessons Learned

The ill-defined, trivial, and overgeneralized ways in which the phrase "lessons learned" has come to be used challenges evaluators to distinguish between casual/informal notions of lessons learned and what we call "high quality" lessons learned.

High-quality lessons learned contain knowledge that can be applied to future action and can be derived from screening according to specific criteria:

1) practice wisdom and experience of practitioners;

2) experience from program participants/clients/intended beneficiaries;

3) evaluation findings – patterns across programs;

4) basic and applied research;

5) expert opinion;

6) cross-disciplinary connections and patterns;

7) assessment of the importance of the lesson learned; and

8) strength of the connection to outcome attainment.

The idea is that the greater the number of supporting sources for a lesson learned, the more rigorous the supporting evidence, and the greater the triangulation of supporting sources, the more confidence one has in the significance and meaningfulness of a lesson learned. Lessons learned with only one type of supporting evidence would be considered a "lessons learned hypothesis." Nested within and cross-referenced to lessons learned will be the actual cases from which practice wisdom and evaluation findings have been drawn. A critical principle here is to maintain the contextual frame for lessons learned, that is, to keep lessons learned grounded in their context. For ongoing learning, the trick is to follow future supposed applications of lessons learned to test their wisdom in action.

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Continued from page 4

will better inform and guide public action: collaborative buy-in; a transparent and public system of performance measurement and accountability; opportunity for innovation, rigorous experimentation, and program and policy redesign; and processes and mechanisms to share lessons and learning. This approach has the potential to produce information that is more likely to be used for public policy decisions and resource allocation as well as to improve program and policy outcomes than the current system of episodic evaluation and experimentation now does. In the era of accountability, we believe that this approach has the potential to engage all the necessary players from the national to the community level in the learning process — and thereby create a learning community. ◆

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JOB OPENING:

The Harvard Family Research Project, located at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, anticipates a job opening for a full-time Research Analyst starting in July/August 1999. This is an excellent opportunity for a professional interested in contributing to the field of evaluation and after-school programs.

Responsibilities: Work on several evaluation-related research projects, including projects focused on after-school programs and results-based accountability among non-profits. May also work on national evaluation newsletter, the *Evaluation Exchange*. Conduct research and collect/analyze data using qualitative and quantitative methods. Conduct extensive interviews with national and community-based organizations, advocacy and research organizations, state and local policymakers, foundation representatives, and other stakeholders. Analyze documents and assist with development of interview protocols and coding schemes. Write reports, journal articles, analytic documents, and meeting presentations. Conduct literature reviews. Participate in proposal development; assist with other special projects. Occasional travel required.

Requirements: Master's degree, 3+ years related research/evaluation experience. Knowledge of/experience with current evaluation theory/practice, public policy, and/or education required. Knowledge of after-school programs preferred. Excellent writing and verbal communication skills, and ability to work independently essential.

To Apply: Send a cover letter and resume to: Tacy Corson, Associate Director for Administration, Harvard Family Research Project, 38 Concord Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Note: This position is contingent on grant funding.

Harvard University is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

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Argyris, Chris. (1993). *Knowledge for action: A guide to overcoming barriers to organizational change.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. This book helps readers understand why individuals and organizations are unable to learn from their action, and presents the steps that must be taken to create change. Part One discusses how to uncover the roadblocks to improvement; Part Two suggests ways to diagnose and intervene to create learning; and Part Three discusses how to use key learnings to solve problem situations. *Tel: (415) 433-1740. http://www.josseybass.com/catalog*

Argyris, Chris & Schön, Donald A. (1996). *Organizational learning II: Theory, method, and practice.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. This book expands on the ideas and concepts of the authors' ground-breaking first book, *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective* (1978). The authors address four principal questions that cut across the field of organizational learning: Why is an organization a learning venue; are real-world organizations capable of learning; what kinds of learning are desirable; and how can organizations develop their capacity for desirable kinds of learning? *Tel: (800) 447-2226. http://www.awl.com*

Greenwood, Davydd J. & Levin, Morten. (1998). *Introduction to action research: Democratizing the research process.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. This publication provides both new and experienced researchers and practitioners with the information and skills necessary to conduct action research. It begins with a brief presentation of two cases of action research and continues with a discussion of the history, philosophy, social change agenda, methodologies, ethical arguments for, and fieldwork tools of action research. *Tel: (805) 499-9774. http://www.sagepub.com*

Hess, Peg M. & Mullen, Edward J. (Eds.) (1995). *Practitioner-researcher partnerships: Building knowledge from, in, and for practice.* Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers Press. The authors in this publication discuss ways to forge more successful and effective partnerships between the worlds of social work practice and social work research. Using diverse examples, they discuss the crucial characteristics that contribute to the survival and enhancement of collaborative relationships as well as key issues and obstacles. The book captures and reflects the complexities of actual partnerships in research and practice. *Tel: (800) 227-3590. http://www.naswpress.org/publications.*

Senge, Peter M. *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* (1990). New York: Doubleday. Senge describes the five disciplines that are necessary for a learning organization: systems thinking; personal mastery; mental models; building shared vision; and team learning. Using examples, Senge discusses how to transform organizations into learning organizations.

Senge, Peter, Kleiner, Art, Roberts, Charlotte, Ross, Richard B., & Smith, Bryan J. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization.* New York: Doubleday. The authors provide the viewpoints for implementation and development of the ideas presented in the *Fifth discipline*. Included are exercises that promote the development of each of the five disciplines. *http://www.fieldbook.com* ◆

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ANNOUNCING: RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY PUBLICATIONS FROM HFRP

Results-Based Accountability Case Studies

New evidence from recent studies by HFRP shows that RBA can be a powerful tool to initiate and enhance systems of continuous improvement and learning. These case studies describe RBA efforts in eight states: Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, and Vermont. Each case study identifies the process of designing and implementing RBA systems. Every report includes a description of state and local RBA efforts, their history, the development process, the uses of the RBA systems, and the lessons learned. The unique experiences of the eight states in the studies can provide valuable insights to those responsible for RBA efforts elsewhere in the nation.

Aiming for Accountability: Lessons Learned from Eight States

This report highlights some of the important lessons in designing and developing RBA based on the insights gained from the studies of eight states. Included is information about how these states have overcome some of the challenges in developing effective RBA systems, and what the characteristics of promising RBA efforts are. The executive summary of this report is a new addition to our collection of *Reaching Results Briefs*, and discusses the potential and limitations of RBA systems based on HFRP's eight case studies.

Each of the state reports is $5.00 plus shipping and handling, and *Lessons Learned from Eight States* is $7.00 plus shipping and handling. A special discount is available if ordering all eight of the state reports or all nine in the series. To obtain these publications, please contact the HFRP publications department at (617) 496-4304 or look at our Web site for an order form. You may also e-mail your order: hfrp_gse@harvard.edu

THE EVALUATION EXCHANGE READER SURVEY

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	Not at all		Somewhat		Very
Informative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Readable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Useful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Thought-provoking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6) Additional Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7) What topics would you like to see covered in future issues of *The Evaluation Exchange?*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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8) Organization Type:

- ☐ Business/Consultant
- ☐ Foundation
- ☐ Government
- ☐ Media
- ☐ Nonprofit
- ☐ Research/Think Tank
- ☐ School/School District
- ☐ University/Academia
- ☐ Other _____

9) Areas of Interest (check as many as apply):

- ☐ Accountability
- ☐ Community Development
- ☐ Early Childhood
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Evaluation
- ☐ Family Support
- ☐ Learning Organizations
- ☐ Training/Professional Development
- ☐ Welfare Reform/Devolution
- ☐ Youth
- ☐ Other _____

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The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook
http://www.fieldbook.com
This site offers strategies, tools, and connections for building a learning organization. Visitors can learn more about the Fieldbook and download or read unpublished material or segments from future Fieldbooks. The site also provides information on study groups, Internet links, and events and talks related to learning organizations.

Stanford Learning Organization Web (SLOW)
http://www.stanford.edu/group/SLOW
SLOW is an informal network of individuals interested in the nature and development of learning organizations. This site offers connections to other Web sites, information about articles, books, videos, and papers related to learning organizations.

Learning Organization Mailing List and Archive
http://world.std.com/~lo/LOinfo.html
This international electronic discussion group brings together those working to build learning organizations. To subscribe, send e-mail to majordomo@world.std.com. Ignore the subject line and begin the message with two lines:
subscribe learning-org
end

The Learning Organizations Homepage
http://www.albany.edu/~k17686/learnorg.html
This site provides information on learning organization strategies for innovation, change, and growth as well as online articles and information about resources.

Karen Horsch
Research Associate
HFRP

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